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Issue No 86

Available from Wednesday,
May 6, 2009



THOUSANDS RALLY TO STOP KIG DEPOT

WHAT'S ON & WATCH

yourkenttv.co.uk



THE RALLY: Protestors marched through Bearsted to proposed KIG site. Search 'protest'

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ISSN 1753-1211-7



Picture NICK AMES

■ BY NICK AMES

AT LEAST 2,000 people massed on Bearsted Green on Monday in protest at plans for the Kent International Gateway.

The plan for a massive road - rail freight interchange off junction eight of the M20 in Hollingbourne is due to be considered by Maidstone council's planning committee tomorrow.

Organisers of the demonstration, which included speeches and a walk to the proposed site, said it was being held to show the strength of local feeling against the plan.

Among the marchers was Conservative MP for Faversham and Mid Kent Hugh Robertson.

He said: "This proposed site is next to the North Downs and would totally ruin two of the most attractive villages in the area, Bearsted and Thurnham.

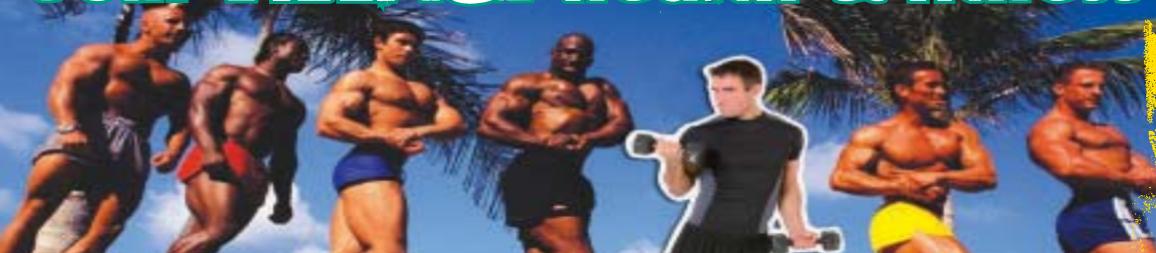
"In my view both places would face devastation. This is the wrong place to put a rail and road interchange. It is in the middle of a motorway rather than at either end and that makes no sense."

Mr Robertson was cheered as he addressed the crowd on the village green and was followed by Paul Carter.

The county council leader said: "We are opposed to this and have assembled a top team of people, including planners and barristers, to fight it."

Conservative county council candidate for Bearsted and Thurnham Jenny Whittle then issued a challenge to Communities Minister

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2 The intriguing discovery of a dice tower at Richborough Roman Fort. Search 'dice' on the community channel



3 Enjoy the work of the Folkestone Art Society's spring exhibition. Search 'Folkestone'

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Printed by Newsfax

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JUDGING PANEL: Vronni Wood, Graham Clarke and Yourmaidstone's Jon Coates

Artists need to wow the judging panel

■ BY ANNA WHITE

ARTISTS entering the Hazlitt's birthday competition will need to present something unique to impress the judging panel.

To celebrate the first birthday of Hazlitt Arts Centre, the StARTle 2009 competition was launched by Maidstone council, supported by Yourmaidstone.

One artist, who has never exhibited before, will win a four-week exhibition at the Graham Clarke Gallery at the Earl Street arts centre.

All of the submitted work will be judged by a panel led by Boughton Monchelsea artist Graham Clarke.

Mr Clarke said: "For the winning piece I will be looking for careful hard work executed with sincerity."

Mr Clarke will be joined on the panel by Jon Coates, who has been news editor of Yourmaidstone since it was launched 18 months ago. He was recently made acting editor.

He said: "I am looking forward to seeing all the entries, which I am sure will show the depth of talent in the Maidstone area."

Maidstone council's marketing manager, Vronni Ward, will also be on the panel.

As a photography enthusiast, an entry which incorporates her interest could get her vote.

Mrs Ward, who is studying for a BA Hons art and design degree at the University of the Creative Arts, in Rochester, said: "I think of myself as a creative person, and I'm interested in photography, so I will be looking out for entries in that area."

The fourth judge will be Laurence Wood, the head of the University of the Creative Arts in Canterbury and an external examiner for other universities across the UK.

The winner of StARTle 2009 will be announced during the Hazlitt's big birthday bash on May 30, which will feature a performance by top British comedian Mark Steel.

During the day there will be free activities and performances.

To enter the competition send a high resolution image of the submission, your name, address, email and a short supporting statement to Vronni Ward, marketing manager, Maidstone Council, Maidstone House, King Street, Maidstone, ME15 6JQ. The closing date is May 13.

yourmaidstone
NEWS IN BRIEF

First aid on hand as girl is hit by cyclist

A FIRST- aider raced to the rescue when a boy on a bike knocked over a young girl in the centre of Maidstone in front of shocked shoppers.

Gary Crawford was walking with his family along Gabriel's Hill when he heard shouts and screams.

The gymnastics coach, from Sandhurst on the Kent/Sussex border, rushed to the scene and examined both the boy and girl.

He said: "They were both okay, although the girl had some bumps on her head and said her elbow hurt."

When paramedics arrived they examined both the children.

Store's cosy welcome for nursing mums

PARENTS and mums-to-be who visit a maternity store will be offered a drink and a biscuit to mark Breastfeeding Awareness Week.

Pregalicious Maternity Wear, in the Royal Star Arcade, in Maidstone, offers breastfeeding mums a comfortable sofa to nurture their babies on.

The awareness week runs from this Sunday to Saturday May 16.

Lisa Skinner, co-owner of Pregalicious, told Yourmaidstone: "We have some regulars who have been using our couch to feed their babies from newborn to toddler so we get to see the babies grow too."

Operating theatre to broadcast to Europe

STATE-of-the-art equipment allowing hundreds of surgeons in the UK and Europe to watch live operations was unveiled at Maidstone Hospital on Friday.

The laparoscopic theatre marks a new era of international healthcare in Kent by broadcasting live footage of minimally invasive operations to surgical training centres.

Between 150 and 200 surgeons in the UK are expected to watch some of the first live procedures this month.

The same amount of surgeons from Europe are due to meet in Milan, in June, to watch more procedures.

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Strictly ballroom as pupils hit dance floor

Young experts inspire friends

■ BY ANNA WHITE

THE addition of ballroom dancing to a school's after-hours timetable has proved an instant hit.

More than 45 pupils aged between five and 11 at Sutton Valence Preparatory School, in Chart Sutton, have signed up for the classes.

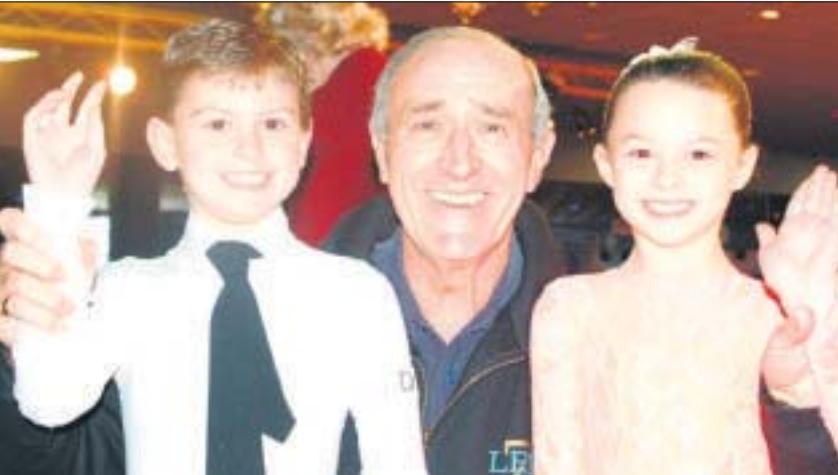
The pupils' interest in dancing has been fuelled by the success of BBC1 show Strictly Come Dancing, as well as that of classmates Katie and Max Harrison.

The brother and sister, who live in Kingswood, have been dancing for two years and performed at a school assembly.

They notched up a notable success in a national competition at Blackpool Tower Ballroom recently and are shortly due to compete in the KPPD competition at Hawkinge, the Stars of the Future contest in Brentwood, and another competition at Blackpool in June.

Katie also landed first place with her partner, Edward Norris, at Camber Dance Festival.

Their mother, Michaela Harrison, said: "Katie started ballet at Sutton Valence Prep School and immediately took to it."



SHOWING POTENTIAL: Young ballroom dancers Max and Katie Harrison with Len Goodman, of Strictly Come Dancing

"She said she would like to learn ballroom dancing, and we were quite surprised when Max said he wanted to go as well, but both of them have already shown great potential."

Max, nine, and Katie, seven, dance for at least two hours each week but put in much more time in the run-up to a competition.

Mrs Harrison added: "Dancing requires a lot of energy as well as skill, and it's an excellent way of firming up the muscles."

The school's ballroom lessons are being organised in conjunction with the Lenham-

based GDC School of Dancing, which also teaches Latin American and disco dancing.

Many of the school's dance students have gone on to compete at a national level, including Lauren Lethbridge and Harry Keep.

Deputy headteacher Alexia Bracewell said: "We teach ballet from nursery through to Year One as part of the curriculum, and we also offer after-school classes in ballet, tap and street jazz dance. Ballroom dancing seemed a natural progression. The children love it and it's a great way of winding down at the end of the day."

Gibb refuses to give up on pay-off

A DISGRACED former NHS trust chief executive at the centre of a superbug scandal will explore other legal options after a High Court judge rejected her pay-off claim.

Rose Gibb was in charge of the trust which runs Maidstone Hospital when two outbreaks of Clostridium difficile led to the death of at least 90 patients.

She sued Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust for breach of contract after it refused to pay her the full £250,000 she had been offered to resign.

Ms Gibb claimed she had been made a scapegoat over the scandal, but on Tuesday last week the judge at the High Court, Mr Justice Treacy, dismissed her claims and ordered her to pay costs, which for the trust alone are expected to be £90,000.

Ms Gibb left the trust days before a highly-critical Healthcare Commission report highlighted management failings leading to the superbug outbreaks.

She was refused permission to appeal by the High Court judge, but has said she will now look at other legal avenues.

Villagers united in KIG plan protest

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Hazel Blears to come and see the strength of feeling against the plan.

"People here do not want this plan and that is clear from the turn-out today," she said.

Brian Clifford, chairman of the Bearsted and Thurnham Society, said: "We wanted to show Maidstone councillors that the village is totally opposed to this plan."

The democratic process has been bypassed by the Kent International Gateway people who went straight to the Secretary of State with the proposals rather than let them be debated locally.

"This is the first time the local authority will get a chance to state its view."

The depot would run 24 hours a day transferring freight to and from the Continent from lorries to trains and vice versa.

KIG applicant AXA Real Estate bypassed Maidstone council by arguing it was taking too long to reach a decision and appealing to go straight to a public inquiry.

But the council will still hold a planning meeting at Maidstone



FACE OF PROTEST: Fraser Johnson, aged five.

Studios tomorrow evening to decide how it would have ruled.

Only 1,000 people can attend the debate, but the meeting will be broadcast live on the council's website, www.digitalmaidstone.co.uk.

Its decision will be taken into account at the public inquiry in October.

Ms Blears will then make the final decision.

Baroness faces questions over second home

A LEADING Labour peer is alleged to have claimed £100,000 in expenses by listing an empty flat in Maidstone as her main home.

The Sunday Times this week reported that Baroness Uddin registered the two-bedroom flat in the county town as her main home, even though she lived a few miles away from Westminster in a house in Wapping, east London.

Neighbours were quoted in the story – which was put together by the paper's Insight team – as saying that nobody lived in the Maidstone flat and it was not even furnished.

Angus Robertson MP, the leader of the Scottish National Party at Westminster, said he would now be asking both the police and the House of Lords authorities to investigate the allegations.

Allegations

Baroness Uddin, who became Britain's first female Muslim peer in 1998, said in a solicitor's statement: "I do not believe that I have done anything wrong or breached any House of Lords rules."

"Should the relevant House of Lords authorities wish to investigate the matter I will, of course, co-operate fully. The Wapping house is rented, while I own the property in Maidstone."

"The Maidstone property is furnished and I strongly deny that I have never lived there. Indeed I have stayed there regularly since buying it."

Born in Bangladesh, Manzila Pola Uddin came to the UK as a teenager and became a community worker and social services officer, while pursuing a political career that saw her rise to be deputy leader of Tower Hamlets council in the early 1990s.

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Lotto winner misses out on £1.5m jackpot prize

THE Champagne won't be on ice for one Lotto winner who let a £1.5 million jackpot slip through their fingers.

Bosses at Camelot had appealed for the owner of the ticket – bought in an unnamed outlet in Swale – to come forward, but the six-month deadline to claim the prize has now elapsed, meaning the cash will go to the Lotto's good causes fund.

The winning numbers were 18, 19, 25, 30, 33 and 43 back in November last year.

Ram-raider jailed after DNA found on stolen car

A RAM-raider who targeted cash machines at three village shops in one night has been jailed for six years.

Nelson Hilden, of Gallants Lane, East Farleigh, was arrested in December last year after forensic teams found his DNA on a smashed windscreen of a stolen four-wheel drive vehicle.

The vehicle was one of two used by Hilden and others in ram-raids in Lyminge, Wye and Lenham, on December 12.

Orchid collector tells of his months in captivity

INTREPID orchid hunter Tom Hart Dyke will be speaking at the Gulbenkian Theatre in Canterbury this Friday.

Hart Dyke will be speak about his adventures around the world collecting plants, which included a nine-month spell in captivity at the hands of Colombian guerrillas.

He will also talk about creating the gardens at his family home, Lullingstone Castle, during the talk at 7.30pm on Friday, May 8. Admission is £10.

Report over Icelandic bank cash to be changed

A REPORT accusing Kent County Council of "negligently" investing taxpayers' money in Icelandic banks is to be reworded.

KCC had threatened to sue the Audit Commission for the use of the word in its Risk and Return document, which investigated multi-million deposits by local authorities in Icelandic banks which were lost.

But chief executive Peter Gilroy revealed during the last full council meeting that the document would be amended.



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Showbiz life at heart of Paul's book

■ BY NICK AMES

PANTO director Paul Hendy, responsible for many of the county's most successful shows, has raided his showbiz background to find material for his latest novel.

Hendy's celebrity pals have praised his second novel, Who Killed Simon Peters?, a black comedy whodunit concerning the death of a back-stabbing celebrity.

TV personality Christopher Biggins described it as a "hysterical, rip-roaring yarn" while ex-EastEndershaun Williamson said it was "a laugh a page and then some".

The story concerns the title character's rise from C-list obscurity to A-list superstardom, before Peters, described as "deluded, self-obsessed and with an ego the size of Coventry" is found dead in suspicious circumstances.

Mr Hendy's first book features the same character. He said: "My earlier work was Diary of a C-List Celeb. At the time I was working as a TV presenter and I drew on a lot of the experiences I heard about – not necessarily my own but those of others I met up with.

"Now the character has clawed his way up to

the A list, but has upset so many people with his rampant ego that suspects are hardly thin on the ground when it comes to his death.

"The story also looks at the way the whole celebrity culture has taken off. I mean look at Susan Boyle of Britain's Got Talent. A few weeks ago no-one had heard of her. Now she is never out of the papers."

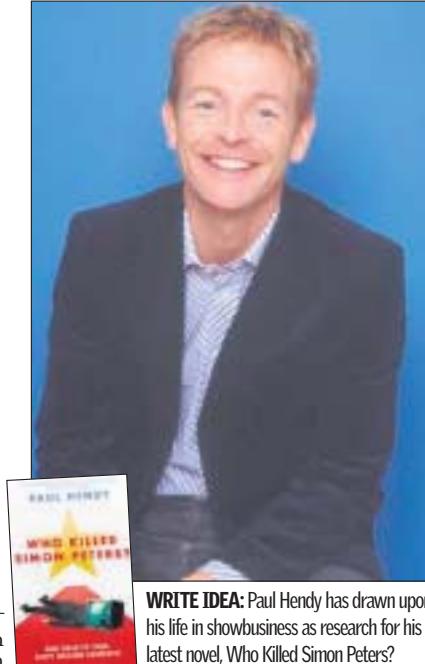
Former BBC Blue Peter presenter Peter Duncan added: "I had to read the book to make sure I got a mention – very funny though."

Other celebrities have jokingly complained they are not mentioned in Mr Hendy's work.

Singer and reality TV star Toyah Wilcox called the book "brilliantly funny", but added: "Why isn't it about me? I think he should have called it Who killed Toyah Wilcox."

Mr Hendy, of Eastridge, near Sandwich, has directed pantomimes at Canterbury's Marlowe Theatre and Chatham's Central Theatre.

He has also hosted TV shows such as Don't Try This At Home and Wheel of Fortune – which had run for 20 years until he took it over but it was cancelled after one series.



WRITE IDEA: Paul Hendy has drawn upon his life in showbusiness as research for his latest novel, Who Killed Simon Peters?

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Swine flu fears caught on students' video



MEDIA students made a YouTube video quizzing people on their knowledge of swine flu – and were surprised at the level of panic the deadly virus is already causing.

Those involved in the project at Canterbury Christ Church University spoke to students at the Canterbury campus to test how much they knew about the epidemic.

One student said: "I'm concerned that it might actually come in the UK and affect a lot of people and I don't know how prepared the health services are to deal with it."

During the two-minute clip, one campus worker told students: "I'm due to fly to Australia in June so I have got a very long flight – about 20 hours – through Dubai. I'm a little bit concerned about being on a plane, potentially with people with swine flu."

Another student told the group filming that every student had been sent an email from university bosses warning them to stay at home if they suffered flu-like symptoms.

The students' video is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=s4cUlfwnWHU

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100 years of history filled Isle's skies



■ BY NICK AMES

A SPECTACULAR fly-past in the skies above the Isle of Sheppey marked the centenary of aviation in the Royal Navy, which purchased its first airship in 1909.

Large crowds took advantage of the sunny weather on Friday to watch the breath-taking display put on by aircraft from the Fleet Air Arm.

The anniversary was also commemorated at Eastchurch, where the first four Royal Navy pilots learned to fly in 1911.

Commander Sue Eagles said: "The historical importance of Eastchurch in the early development of Naval aviation is immense."

The fly-past included Harrier GR7 and GR9 jets, Hawk and Falcon aircraft, and a historic Sea Vixen.

Cmdr Eagles said: "Not only were the first four Naval pilots trained at Eastchurch, but the first Naval aircraft were also built there."

"Sheppey was the cradle of aviation in this country. The budding Naval aviators found themselves immersed in the wealth of pioneering aeronautical technology and endeavouring to be built up there."

In 1911, Eastchurch became the first Royal Naval Air Station. In January of the following year, one of the first four Navy pilots took a Shorts aircraft from Eastchurch to Sheerness, flying it from a rudimentary plat-



form on the forward turret of a cruiser, HMS Africa, which was at anchor.

This was the first time an aircraft had taken-off from a ship in Britain.

In May, 1912, the same pilot and aircraft, Lt Charles Samson flying an S.38, took off from a similar platform on another cruiser, HMS Hibernia, while the ship made 15 knots.

The Short brothers moved to Rochester in 1913, but the association with the Navy led to their development of seaplanes and, in turn, flying boats for which the company became famous.

Aircraft designer Richard Fairey began his aviation industry career at Eastchurch in 1911, initially with the Blair Atholl Syndicate and then Shorts in 1913, before setting up his own company in 1915.

Iconic

The Fairey Swordfish remains the iconic Navy aircraft by virtue of its achievements in the Second World War such as attacking German battleships despite its slow speed and light armament.

The Sheppey links survive with Shorts' last aircraft, the Tucano, serving currently as a pilot trainer for the Navy.

With today's Fleet Air Arm largely a rotary-winged force, its helicopters are products of what is now the Augusta Westland Company. The first aircraft built by Westland were twelve Short 184 seaplanes for the Admiralty in 1915.

Fly Navy 100 is the programme of events this year marking the Royal Navy's aviation centenary, the service having placed a contract for its first airship in 1909.

Friday's events also saw a service at the Pioneer Memorial in Eastchurch which was attended by current and former serving members of the Fleet Air Arm, veterans, guests, and residents.

Guest of honour was Admiral Sir Raymond Lygo KCB, Vice Chief of Naval Staff between 1975 and 1978, who took the salute with Rear Admiral Simon Charlier, Chief of Staff Aviation and Rear Admiral Fleet Air Arm, as the fly-past soared overhead.

CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS: The Isle of Sheppey was treated to the sight of (above) Harrier jump jets and (left) a historic Sea Vixen on Friday

Thanks to all your generosity Kent's kids are now better off

CHILDREN from across the county will benefit from thousands of pounds generously donated by KOS Media's army of readers.

The Kent Kids for Christmas appeal allowed people to purchase our sister paper Kent on Sunday for 60p over the festive period, with the profits handed over to charities that help youngsters who face disadvantages such as disabilities and homelessness.

The charities that will benefit from your money this year are Demelza Hospice Care for Children, Martha Trust, the Kentish Retts Angels and The Molly Bubb Fund.

Cash is also being donated to Invicta FM's Help a Kent Child campaign.

The Molly Bubb Fund was



set up following the death last year of four-year-old Molly from Canterbury, who was struck with a rare form of brain cancer called chordoid plexus carcinoma.

Her mother Kerry said the £500 donation will go towards researching and raising awareness of the illness so other families do not have to go through what theirs did.

A further £500 has gone to

the Kentish Retts Angels, which is a support group for parents of Rett syndrome sufferers.

Martha Trust provides a home for life for people with profound physical and learning difficulties, and has a residential home and day centre in Deal.

Fundraiser Serita Boxall said of the £1,000 donation: "It's a lot of money and will be a huge help. It's really kind of your readers to have donated in this way."

Demelza House children's hospice will also be receiving £1,000 while £5,000 is being given to Invicta FM's Help a Kent Child Campaign, from which several charities will be hoping to receive a share of the total amount raised.

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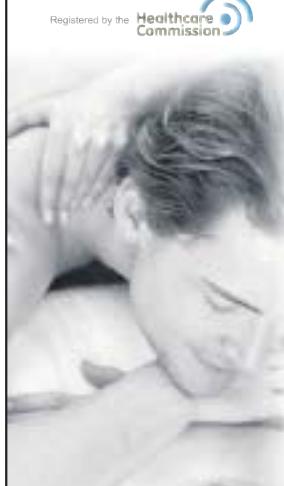
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TODAY'S FORECAST



FIVE-DAY KENT FORECAST

Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon		
Ashford	18°C	18°C	17°C	16°C	16°C	Gravesend	17°C	18°C	17°C	16°C	16°C
Canterbury	17°C	16°C	16°C	16°C	16°C	Maidstone	18°C	17°C	17°C	15°C	16°C
Chatham	17°C	16°C	15°C	14°C	14°C	Ramsgate	17°C	16°C	16°C	16°C	16°C
Dartford	17°C	18°C	17°C	16°C	16°C	Rochester	17°C	16°C	15°C	14°C	14°C
Dover	14°C	14°C	14°C	14°C	15°C	Sevenoaks	16°C	16°C	15°C	13°C	14°C
Faversham	17°C	16°C	15°C	14°C	14°C	Sittingbourne	17°C	16°C	15°C	14°C	14°C
Folkestone	14°C	14°C	14°C	14°C	15°C	Tonbridge	16°C	16°C	16°C	14°C	15°C
Gillingham	17°C	16°C	15°C	14°C	14°C	Tun Wells	16°C	16°C	16°C	14°C	15°C

WEEKEND HIGH TIDES

tham	Saturday	1:46pm	5.9m
	Sunday	2:22pm	5.9m
er	Saturday	12:03pm	6.4m
	Sunday	12:41pm	6.4m
geness	Saturday	12:00pm	7.4m
	Sunday	12:36pm	7.4m
ngate	Saturday	12:33pm	4.8m
	Sunday	1:11pm	4.9m
erness	Saturday	1:36pm	5.6m
	Sunday	2:12pm	5.6m
ftstable	Saturday	1:51pm	5.1m
	Sunday	2:25pm	5.0m



AROUND THE WORLD YESTERDAY

Amsterdam	12°C	Madrid	23°C
Athens	18°C	New York	13°C
Barcelona	22°C	Paris	15°C
Beijing	26°C	Rome	21°C
Bombay	32°C	Sydney	22°C
Cape Town	22°C	Tenerife	20°C
Cardiff	11°C	Tokyo	23°C
Gibraltar	19°C	Vancouver	14°C
Hong Kong	26°C	Warsaw	22°C
Las Palmas	23°C	Wellington	14°C



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QUESTION & ANSWER

JANE MARTIN



Q & A

Marijke Cox talks to Jane Martin of specialist Canterbury-based tour company Tours of the Realm, which promises to give visitors a real taste of Kent and further afield by going off the well worn tourist tracks

Q Can you tell us a little about yourself?

A I was born and brought up in Kent. I have been married to John for 31 years and we have spent most of our married life living in different parts of the world.

I spent a great deal of our time abroad taking visitors – either official ones connected to work, or family and friends – on tours of where we were living.

I always tried to make sure we saw not only the important tourist sites, but also the hidden treasures that were well known to the locals but off the beaten track for large travel companies.

With a lifelong interest in history and my experience of showing visitors around, my dream was to become a driver/guide.

Q Can you explain what Tours of the Realm is and how it came about?

A Tours of the Realm offers sightseeing tours of rural and historic Britain to small and exclusive groups of up to five people with a particular focus on Kent and the South East.

Tours of the Realm was founded by Denise Ryeland 15 years ago and when she retired last year I bought the company from her.

Q How does Tours of the Realm work?

A Generally clients find my website at www.toursoftherealm.com.

They contact me and I put together a personalised itinerary tailored to their interests.

Q What client base is Tours of the Realm aimed at?

A I market to quite a wide client base. Passengers coming in on cruise ships at Dover; visitors to London who want to escape to the country for a day or two; and Britons who want to discover hidden treasures and quirky delights.

Q Do you cover just Kent, or further than that?

A I focus on Kent and the South East, but this is not exclusive and I am happy to take clients all over the UK.

Q What reasons would you give someone visiting Kent to use your services?

A For the visitor who likes to travel in comfort in a relaxed and informal way and, most importantly, at their own pace, with a greater degree of personal attention than can be expected from larger travel companies, Tours of the Realm is ideal.

Q What is the best thing about your job?

A I spend my time going to fascinating places and meeting interesting people. This is what I've always wanted to do and now I am in the position where I get paid to do it.

Q And the most challenging thing?

A The economic climate.

Q What kind of feedback have you had about Tours of the Realm?

A Overwhelmingly visitors say that their experience has been relaxed, informative and fun, and that it has given them a taste of the "real" Britain – and that they hope to come back for more.

Q You spend your time touring Kent so you must have seen a lot of places. What is your favourite part of the county?

A I love the Weald with its lovely old villages, windy lanes, world renowned gardens and beautiful countryside. On the other hand, Romney Marsh is fascinatingly enigmatic whatever the season and you can't help being drawn into it. Walking along the white cliffs from St Margaret's to Walmer is awe-inspiring and I totally understand why Charles Dickens particularly loved this walk. Kent has so much to choose from that it's impossible to have a favourite area.

Q What are your hopes for the year ahead?

A That Tours of the Realm continues to attract a lot of interest and I become inundated with bookings.

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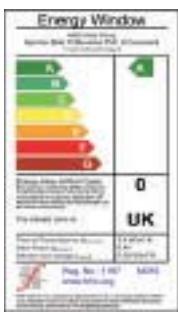
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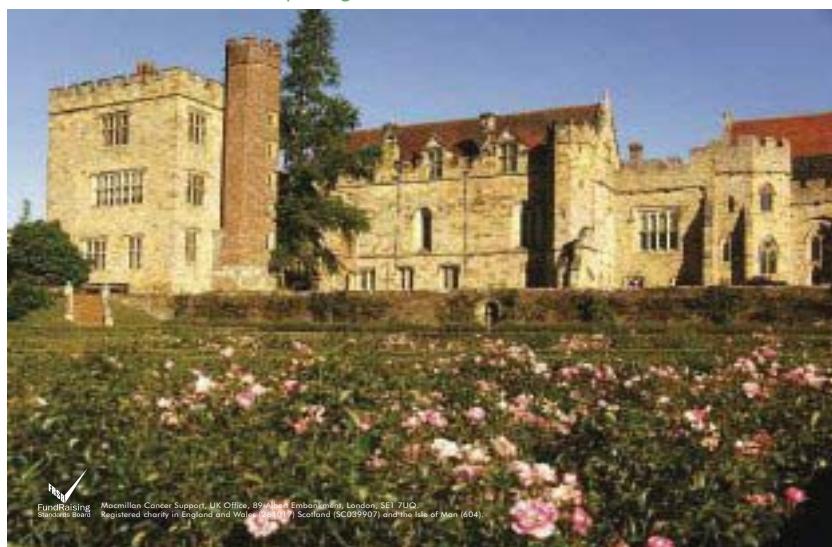
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National Police Dog Trials were held in Kent for the first time. Search 'dog'



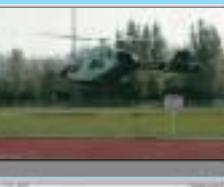
Zeebrugge bell rung in memory of Dover Patrol heroes. Search 'bell'



Harlequins host a training session with Medway Dragons. Search 'Dragons'



Sound of Music exhibition at Turner Contemporary Space. Search 'Turner'



Air ambulance launches recycling service at Julie Rose Stadium. Search 'air'

EDITOR'S CHOICE

You can view all these videos and others from around the county with the click of a mouse at...

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Scrap Dartford tolls and let people breathe easy

EXCLUSIVE

■ BY EMILY HALL

THE Dartford Crossing toll could be suspended after a report found pollution from queuing traffic may be sending people to an early grave.

Councillors have called on the Government to act immediately after a Dartford council working group linked smog from queuing traffic to higher than average levels of lung and heart disease in the area.

Council leader Jeremy Kite has demanded action from the Department for Transport after the report found life expectancy in Dartford was a full year lower than in other areas of Kent.

He has now formally asked the Government to temporarily suspend the £1.50 peak time charge to see if free-flowing traffic reduces the level of dangerous fumes.

"We are asking the Government to realise that at some point they will have to put people's health before making money," he said.

"If people living next to a nuclear power station all fell ill it would be a national scandal, but for some reason the Government seems to think that because a road network is causing our health problems it is something they can ignore."

"For the people here it is a living nightmare. What we have seen is a series of appalling decisions that have increased congestion."

The Dartford Crossing is used by about 150,000 vehicles a day. It is the fourth most congested stretch of road in the UK, making



UNDER A CLOUD: Air pollution near the Dartford Crossing is damaging people's health, local councillors say

it a pollution hotspot.

Councillors formed a working group after NHS figures revealed there was a higher level of emergency hospital admissions for heart and lung problems – including childhood asthma – in those routinely exposed to the choked-up crossing.

The report said: "With the exception of Bean Interchange, all of the other air management areas are in areas with higher concentrations of health problems."

"It is clear that while the actions taken by the borough council will mitigate some of the problems, the likely increase in traffic within the road system and crossing will continue to have a major effect."

A DoT spokesman said they were looking at changes to tolls but would not say whether a suspension was a possibility.

He added: "Studies indicate that without any charge traffic levels would be even higher, leading to even more congestion and seriously worsening pollution."

"After publication of the Dartford Crossing capacity study [in April] we said we would carry out further work to consider whether improving the layout of the toll plazas or applying one-way tolling on the crossing could deliver improvements to the flow of traffic in the short term."

• **What do you think?** Email your comments to editorial@kosmedia.co.uk

The countdown to Invicta's new change of Heart

COMMERCIAL radio station Invicta FM has confirmed the date on which it will undergo the biggest change in its 25-year history.

On June 22 it will ditch the Invicta name it has used since its inception in 1984 and become Heart.

The name change, first revealed last year, is part of a strategy by Invicta's owners to enhance its appeal to advertisers and link in with the national Heart network.

Invicta chiefs say listeners will benefit from a boost in production standards and access to bigger stars than ever before.

Critics, however, say the move continues to erode the station's Kent roots and further put at risk programmes produced at Invicta's studios in Whitstable.

While key shows, such as breakfast with James Heming and Gemma Shepherd and the drivetime slot with Neil Kefford will remain, much of the daytime and weekend schedules will be networked shows with the likes of former Neighbours star Jason Donovan and TV presenter Toby Anstis.

Quality

Invicta FM managing director Neil Webster insists the move will only bring positives.

He said: "We are delivering a high quality national product, but delivering it locally.

"From the listeners' point of view, they will get largely the same but lots more investment in things like on-air production – it will sound slicker – the music will be much the same as it is now."

The station says it is in negotiations with a host of events – including the Sugababes and James Morrison shows at the St Lawrence Ground in Canterbury next month – to use as high-profile platforms to promote the name change.

And 'Heart Angels' will be taking to the streets to spread the word, as well as an extensive television and advertising campaign in the week of the change.

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Award Winning Company

Savouring spring's flavours

He's one of the rising stars on the celebrity chef scene, close friends with Hell's Kitchen's Marco Pierre White - for whom he worked as head chef for years - and has already come out in support of our Buy Local Produce campaign. Now **Richard Phillips**, who grew up in Rainham and lives near Maidstone, writes for KOS Media in the first of a series of regular features, supporting our campaign and our website, www.foodforkent.co.uk



OVER the past few years there has been a distinct rise in the quality and availability of top-class homegrown vegetables, meat, fish and fruit.

Farmers have raised their game in the face of stiff competition and pressure from supermarket chains. For me, running three restaurants in Kent, it is vital that I receive the best food and it's great to know that I can support local farmers and the local economy by buying local produce.

It's not just about buying local for the sake of it though. I need the best quality in my restaurants because that is what customers expect and, to be honest, I would not work with anything less.

Locality is only a part of the equation though. The best, tastiest food is that which is being grown right now. Seasonality is the key to not only eating the best, but also diversifying our menus and diets.

By eating food out of season, you are diminishing the experience. With spring well and truly here, now is the time when we are going to be seeing the very best produce,

meats and fish. Spring is one of the county's most colourful seasons, bringing richness in variety, taste and availability.

It's a time when we should be making the most of new season fruit, vegetables, meats and fish. The good thing about making the most of the plentiful availability of new season produce is that prices are also keener - you'll notice this reflected at the till.

Seasonality and making meals from food in plentiful supply has, due to the advent of supermarkets stocking their shelves with processed food, become something of a lost way of eating.

The impact this has had on local farming has meant we often sacrifice freshness and taste for accessibility.

Convenience is one thing, but when items which we can grow seasonally - and often better and tastier - are shipped half way around the world after being picked days and sometimes weeks before, we have to begin to question if it really is the best way.

This month, one of my favourite vegetables is in season and it is without doubt one of the most versatile and arguably best of English vegetables - asparagus.

The season doesn't last long, so let's make the most of this great vegetable that is grown all over Kent. When purchasing asparagus, go for the medium-sized stems as they have had enough time to take on the flavour, but not too much time to be tough.

Fresh asparagus can make the perfect accompaniment to any main course and works equally well with fresh fish or meat. The season also brings a fresh crop of new potatoes and in the next couple of weeks we have the arrival of spring lamb and Kentish crabs to look forward to.

The dish I have prepared this week is warm poached salmon, Kentish asparagus and warm new potato salad. This is a quick and easy dish to prepare but guaranteed to treat your taste buds to a range of subtle and strong flavours, making the most of our local produce.

All of the ingredients used in the recipe are available from the [foodforkent.co.uk](http://www.foodforkent.co.uk) website.

Richard Phillips

RICHARD'S RECIPE

150g piece of Fresh Salmon Fillet (bones removed, skin left on)

Cooking liquor for the salmon
500ml water, 100ml Tenterden Chapel Down white wine, half a lemon juiced, 5 peppercorns, 8 parsley stalks

4 Kentish asparagus spears (peeled and cooked, in boiling salted water)
5 medium sized Jersey new potatoes
Teaspoon chopped chives, fine
Teaspoon chopped shallots, fine
50g rocket salad (washed)
5 yellow cherry tomatoes (cut in to halves)
10 green beans, Cooked in boiling water

Vinaigrette
150ml of olive oil
50ml of white wine vinegar
25ml luke warm water
Teaspoon of honey
Teaspoon grain mustard



Place the mustard and honey into a bowl, then whisk in the vinegar, then slowly add the olive oil, then finely add the water, season with salt and pepper

- Bring to the boil the cooking liquor for the salmon. Place the salmon into the liquid and turn off the heat, leave to stand for 4-5min. Remove from the cooking liquid, remove skin and flake into nice chunky pieces.

- Slice the cooked potatoes and mix with the chopped chives, shallots and a few drops of dressing (see recipe) season with salt and pepper, cover with cling film and keep warm. Mix the rocket leaves with the dressing just before serving

- Place the warm potatoes into the centre of the plate, then place the green beans and tomatoes on top then the rocket leaves, then the warm flaked salmon, arrange the asparagus spears around and drizzle with the grain mustard and honey dressing. Enjoy!

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BREAK TIME

Olympic taster for skilled trainees

TALENTED MidKent College students took part in a challenge in preparation for the London '2011 Skills Olympics'.

Brickwork, carpentry and painting and decorating trainees undertook a six-hour task as part of the college's Skilled Up event as a taste of what to expect at the international SkillBuild competition, being held in the capital in 2011.

Oakwood Park student Jacqueline Smith won first prize for the Decorative Occupations element. She said: "Today has been challenging and fun and we should all be proud of our achievements."

In the next month, 340 students from Kent's six further education colleges will take part in a Skilled Up competition sponsored by Wates Construction, South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) and the Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council, with additional prizes offered by Carpentry suppliers Buck and Hickman.



SKILLED WORK: Jacqueline Smith puts the finishing touches to her freehand work

Space cadets launch latest lessons in rocket science

■ BY ANNA WHITE

STUDENTS from eight Maidstone schools have entered the next phase of an ongoing project to explore the weird and wonderful subject of science.

The Growing Scientists project was first launched in October last year after industry bosses appealed for more interest in the subject.

The eight schools taking part in the three-year project have already hosted a series of space camps and various themed weeks, including lessons in biology, magic of chemistry and how to make bouncy custard balls.

To mark the start of the next stage a 24ft rocket was launched from Sutton Valence School on Tuesday last week – the biggest rocket ever to be launched from a school site.

The next phase will see the youngsters continue to learn about the subject and discover the extremes of living in space during after-school sessions.

Activities include designing their own missions, communicating with mission control during a disaster, tasting some stellar snacks, building and programming a robot, and learning about chemical rockets.

The sessions will run at various schools until the Martian Mummies session, on June 23, when the youngsters will be asked to unlock the secrets of Martian soil while they discover which one of their crew has the plague of the Mars Mummy.

The pupils will also be able to set up a live



LIFT OFF: Pupils launch a rocket at Sutton Valence School to mark the latest phase of the Growing Scientists project

video conference with the National Space Centre in Leicester.

Events co-ordinator, Ian Wesson, said: "The Growing Scientists project has been evolving and is now in the next phase, which offers students a more specialised approach to space science.

"I think it is a wonderful opportunity for students to really explore the science behind satellites and rockets, space stations and comets.

"Space science is one of the best-kept secrets in the UK and as educators we have a duty

to reveal it to the public."

Schools taking part in the Growing Scientists scheme are Maidstone Girls Grammar, Invicta Grammar, Maidstone Grammar, Sutton Valence, Maplesden Noakes, Astor of Hever, Oakwood Park Grammar and St Simon Stock.

During the second year of the scheme students will take part in a CSI forensics day, followed by specialist lessons including forensic chemistry and DNA profiling.

Activities for the third year are still being planned.

SEND your schools news and pictures to yourmaidstone@kosmedia.co.uk. You can also upload your video clips of schools events on to www.yourkenttv.co.uk

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yourmaidstoneblogger

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Dear Sir.... I've found even more reasons to be miserable

IT'S strange what people complain about, isn't it?

Here we are putting up with the worst recession since money was invented, and now there's the prospect of a swine flu pandemic.

What next, a plague of frogs? A spate of incurable boils?

With all the headlines blaring the latest Armageddon-causing catastrophe you could be forgiven for thinking 'can things get any worse?'

But even when people may be having visions of a population stricken with swine flu sinking beneath a global-warming-induced flood as bailiffs repossess our cars, there is always someone who will actively seek out more things to get worked up about.

For example, the latest set of figures from the Advertising Standards Agency reveals the adverts which attracted the most complaints over the last 12 months. Unfortunately, these were not complaints based on an advert's like-

lihood to annoy. Ocean Finance is safe for the moment, as are Barry Scott and the infuriating person who penned the theme for Sheila's Wheels, who deserves some kind of Clockwork Orange-style re-education programme.

No, these were genuine complaints, the dull sort contained in letters which begin: 'Dear Sir...' These are the 'genuinely offended', or at least the people who feel they should be offended by something because someone else may be offended.

This is a modern phenomenon; vicarious offence when the letter writer has failed to be offended enough themselves, so chooses to experience offence on behalf of other people.

It's easy to spot; just look for the phrase "because X might offend Y". 'Might' not 'has', because really the vicarious offendee has no idea whether Y will be offended by X at all.

While most of the moaning about these second-hand moral transgressions is the pastime of prudes and the excessively politically correct, it can also be an excuse for failing to

confront or acknowledge important issues. Claiming offence is a coward's way of closing down debate on an uncomfortable subject, a favoured tool of extremists or others with an agenda to promote. Worse still is claiming to be offended by unpleasant truths, simply as a means of pretending they don't exist.

The advert that garnered the most complaints was made on behalf of children's charity Barnardo's, showing scenes of children being physically and emotionally abused.

The writers told the Advertising Standards Agency they were "concerned about the scenes" which included beatings and drug abuse. If these people were genuinely concerned, wouldn't it have made more sense to send a letter to Barnardo's?

Maybe even one with a cheque in it?

EDITOR'S NOTE: All blogs are supplied with full name and address of the authors. They do not reflect the view of the newspaper but are designed to give our readers the chance to air their views.

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submit an article to us (of around 550 words) and email it to the editor. And don't forget, for all the latest news and video from your town log-on to www.yourmaidstone.co.uk

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Find out more about the competition and enter at www.robinsondrinks.com/benatural.

Robinsons be Natural is available in three delicious flavours – Orange & Passionfruit, Apple & Strawberry and Blackcurrant & Pear and can be found now in supermarkets across the country.

To encourage you to get out and enjoy nature, we are giving two lucky readers the chance to win a top of the range digital camera from Canon!

To be in with a chance of winning your very own Canon Powershot A480 10.0 Megapixel Digital Camera worth £149.99, simply answer the question below and send your entry on a postcard along with your e-mail address (if applicable), name, address, and daytime telephone number to Robinsons Competition, KOS Media, Apple Barn, Smeeth, Ashford, Kent, TN25 6SR.

Question: How many flavours are there of Robinsons be Natural?

No purchase necessary. For terms and conditions see www.kentnews.co.uk or call 01303 817073.

If you do not wish to receive any literature please write 'no literature' on your entry.

The closing date is June 1, 2009.



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yourletters

TALK TIME

JOANNE CLARK

The 25-year-old talks about why now is the perfect time for her and her fiancé to buy a house in Maidstone and why they are leaving Sittingbourne

Tell us a little bit about yourself.

I'm currently living at home with my parents in Sittingbourne, but I am looking to buy a house with my fiancé. I work as a payroll accounting supervisor for a company in Maidstone and my partner is a scaffolder and a semi-professional footballer for the Tonbridge Angels football club.

Why do you want to move from Sittingbourne to Maidstone?

To spend less time travelling as I work in Maidstone town centre and I also keep my horse in Bearsted, so I will be spending less money on petrol, which in turn means less wear and tear on my car, and will save me some money, especially as petrol prices are on their way back up.

Which areas have you been looking in?

I have looked at a few houses in Bearsted and Downswood.

Why those areas in particular?

The area is perfectly located between work and my stables, so I wouldn't have any trouble commuting through Maidstone traffic during peak hours. This is also a really lovely area with good schools and the estates are very friendly.

Has the recession not put you off?

No, this is a perfect time for first time buyers as we have our ten per cent deposit and the houses are at a lower price than usual, so we can afford to buy a better house. Also, with stamp duty exemption band extended to December, we will not need to pay it for houses up to £175,000.



YOUR LETTERS



I think it's a job worth doing

Top marks to the councils working together to cut costs of services to the taxpayer.

It is quite right to employ a temporary consultant. They'll look at everything and if they don't make the savings to pay for their job they'll lose it.

I can't understand why anyone would be against this idea. Councils should work together to provide joint services and cut costs.

Basil James, from Maidstone, comment posted on web story at www.yourmaidstone.co.uk

Appointment should be kept

I think there probably are too many 'middle-managers', or bureaucrats as they are otherwise known, in local authorities.

Many of these are unnecessary and could be lost to save money.



COMMENT ONLINE TOO

NOT only can you use email and letters to respond to our stories, don't forget you can comment via our website too.

Beneath most stories on the www.yourmaidstone.co.uk website there is the facility to leave your comments on whatever YOU thought of the online article. To leave your remarks, simply click on the 'Add your comments' link and tell us what you think. And remember, www.yourmaidstone.co.uk is updated daily, bringing you the latest, breaking news from across Maidstone as well as our villages. We will include the best on these pages too – ensuring your comments reach the widest possible audience.

In addition, if you find your newsagent, supermarket or petrol station runs out of Your Maidstone before you've picked up your copy, you never need to miss out. On www.yourmaidstone.co.uk you can access, for free, the full newspaper in our highly acclaimed e-editions.

But for once, the appointment of a partnership manager to work across several councils to find ways of saving our cash should be applauded, not criticised as the Taxpayers' Alliance suggests in this story.

If they are not worth their salary in savings they will surely be sacked, so well done Maidstone council.

Claire Rogers, from West Malling, comment posted on web story at www.yourmaidstone.co.uk

Why so quick to rasher into a panic?

So now there is yet another media-inspired panic for everyone to get into a flap about.

What will the Government do about Swine Flu?

Will they burn all the pigs as they ordered last time during the foot and mouth outbreak?

Whatever it is I am sure it will go totally over the top and be completely unnecessary.

Alex Phillips, by email



Time to listen to us about the Gurkhas

Everyone seems to be allowed to stay in the UK but the Gurkhas – and that has to be wrong.

This Government seems to have no feeling for the amount of public support these extremely respected men and women have among the British public.

The administration in Whitehall is always trying to make itself more popular – why not just accept that people want the requests of those who have served Britain for so many years to be taken on board?

It is the very least they can do in the way of thanks.

Vicky Mills, from Maidstone, by email

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Get a treat and raise dough for charity

National Doughnut Week is fast approaching and I would like to make a special appeal to your readers to support this annual charity event, which takes place from May 9 to 16 in aid of The Children's Trust.

Everyone deserves a treat from time to time and this fun campaign is a great way to share some delicious doughnuts with family, friends and work colleagues, and also raise some dough for charity.

All you need to do is to purchase doughnuts from participating bakers – wherever you see the National Doughnut Week posters displayed.

By doing so, you will be helping to make a real difference to some very special children.

Money raised by participating bakers and the public will benefit The Children's Trust, a national charity, which provides care, education and therapy for children with multiple disabilities and complex health needs, and rehabilitation services to children with an acquired brain injury.

Last year, National Doughnut Week's fundraising activities across the UK raised more than £30,000 and, with your support, we hope to beat this figure in 2009.

So bakers, if you haven't done so, please register now and get baking and all you lovely people get buying.

For ideas on how to get involved, plus celebrities' doughnut

favourites, please visit: www.thechildrenstrust.org.uk/doughnuts.

To make credit or debit card donations, please call 01737 365027.

Thank you – and don't forget to buy yourself a doughnut treat!

Ainsley Harriot, TV presenter and chef, on behalf of The Children's Trust, by email

Listen up, it's time to check your hearing

During Deaf Awareness Week, which runs until this Sunday, RNID is asking us all to look after our hearing health and take the charity's special hearing check.

People can take up to 15 years to acknowledge their hearing loss.

RNID's message is simple – if you have hearing difficulties, dial 0844 800 3838 or visit www.rnid.org.uk/hearingmatters to check your hearing now so you can start taking steps to return to a fulfilling life.

RNID is The Co-operative charity of the year 2009 and as part of this partnership The Co-operative is supporting RNID's campaign to check the hearing of a million people.

During Deaf Awareness Week Co-operative Food stores will be fundraising and raising awareness about RNID's hearing checks.

RNID also wants to hear about the impact hearing loss has on people



HEAR THIS:
Richard Wilson

people's everyday lives. Whatever your experiences – good or bad – please email your story, in confidence, to mediarelations@rnid.org.uk.

Richard Wilson OBE, actor, on behalf of RNID

Young carers, click into this competition

I have a family member who is affected by dementia so I know life can be difficult for those caring for a loved one. What I can't imagine is how much harder it is for the thousands of young people who take on this responsibility.

From my time in da Bungalow, I know that having the chance to cut loose and have fun is part of what being young is all about.

Sadly, many young people who are caring do not have the time to do so.

That's why I'm calling on all young carers to take a moment to escape from their daily routine and take part in Zoom! – a national photo competition for young carers.

Zoom! is open to any carer under the age of 18. You just need to enter a photo you have taken which reflects any aspect of your life for the chance to win one of ten great prizes. Entries must be submitted by May 14 and winners will be announced during Carers Week, June 8-14.

For details see www.carersweek.org or call 0845 241 2582.

**Richard McCourt,
Dick from Dick and Dom, by email**

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In search of the truth

Philip Pullman's lavish Dark Materials is brought to the stage in two parts – and you can bring your own picnic

HIS DARK MATERIALS

Wednesday, May 6 to Sunday,

May 10

Churchill Theatre, Bromley



READERS all over the world have been captivated by Philip Pullman's epic fantasy series His Dark Materials.

The first of the award-winning trilogy, The Golden Compass, was turned into a Hollywood blockbuster in 2007 and now theatregoers can enjoy a lavish production of the story when it visits Kent this week.

The Churchill Theatre will be the only venue in the South East on the show's UK tour, so fans should not miss the chance to catch this major production.

In order to do justice to the sprawling story, the show is presented in two parts which can both be seen in one day, with time for a 'picnic break' between performances. Alternatively, there is an opportunity to see the two performances on separate evenings.

Set in worlds that are both familiar and unknown, His Dark Materials follows the thrilling adventures of young Lyra and her friend Will, a boy on the run.

When Lyra hears her uncle, Lord Asriel, arguing with religious authorities about the mysterious 'dust', she sets out to discover the truth. Her journey will take her to the Arctic and bring her into the company of the intriguing, but dangerous Mrs Coulter.

She meets fantastical creatures in parallel worlds, from the child-catching Gobblers to armoured polar bears. Although Lyra lives in an Oxford which looks much like our own, hers is a world in which people's souls are brought to life in the form of animals, or daemons.

Birmingham Repertory Theatre's artistic director Rachel Kavanaugh has worked with specialist puppet company Blind Summit Theatre to bring these magical creatures to life, while a company of 25 actors will bring Pullman's characters from the



Picture CATHERINE ASHMORE

FACING YOUR DAEMONS: Puppeteers bring the fantasy animals to life in the stage version of the award-winning His Dark Materials stories, which is coming to Bromley's Churchill Theatre

page to the stage. In part one, Lyra uncovers the secrets of the truth-telling alethiometer and learns that her fate is strangely linked with Will's.

Together they must find a magical knife which can take them to parallel worlds, but in part two Lyra is kidnapped. Will must help to free her before they can travel to the land of the dead and fight to decide the fate of Good and Evil.

His Dark Materials can be seen in its entirety on Thursday, Saturday and Sunday. Bring your own picnic or enjoy between shows. Part one will also be performed at 7pm tonight, followed by part two at 7pm on Friday.

Tickets are priced from £21 to £30 for each performance. See both parts in one day and enjoy discounted rates of £80 for two people and £146 for families of four.

To book call the box office on 0870 060 6620 or visit the website at www.ambassadortickets.com/bromley.



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THE PAPERBOYS

Monday, May 11
Zebra Bar, Maidstone



ECLECTIC folk-rock quintet The Paperboys are travelling all the way from Canada to make a special delivery.

Kent music fans are being offered the chance to see this acclaimed band perform in the intimate setting of the Zebra Bar, at Maverick's latest event. The Paperboys routinely sell out shows at the some of the most prestigious clubs and festivals in Canada, the US, Mexico and Europe, so do not miss this opportunity to see them in the county town.

The Vancouver-based group was formed in 1991 by vocalist and songwriter Tom Landa. Members include Kendel Carson on fiddle and vocals, Brad Gillard on bass and banjo, Geoffrey Kelly on flutes and drummer Matt Brain. The band's last five albums have all been nominated for a Juno Award, the Canadian equivalent of a Grammy, resulting in one win. Two albums have also picked up West Coast Music



Awards. Also appearing is Nate Campany, a songwriter and musician who has written for acts such as Backstreet Boys.

The concert will start at 7.45pm and tickets cost £13 in advance and £15 on the night. To book call 01622 744481.

CLARE BERNAL

Sunday, May 10
Mascalls School,
Paddock Wood



A FUNDRAISING event is being held this weekend in memory of Clare Bernal from Tunbridge Wells who was killed in 2005.

The 22-year-old was shot dead by a former boyfriend whom she had dated for just three weeks.

Since then Clare's mother Tricia has joined forces with two other bereaved mothers to form The Clare, Rana and Tania Trust with the aim of not only highlighting the dangers of stalking, but also to promote education, communication



and encouraging different agencies to work together.

The Clare Bernal 5km Fun

Run Day has been organised with the Tunbridge Wells Community Safety Partnership, with the help of Paddock Wood Athletic Club, and is sponsored by Cotswold Outdoor.

The fun starts at 10am and costs £7.50 to enter on the day or £5 in advance. Register at www.tchg.org.uk or call 01892 501702 for an entry form.

After the run, The CRT Trust and local singer-songwriter Paul Dunton have arranged an afternoon of live music from Paul Dunton and Crew, The Violet Jive, Seven Score, The Charlie Rivers Band and The West Street Band.

There will also be a barbecue and a raffle.

MAIDSTONE SCHOOLS REUNITED

Thursday, May 7
Beluga Bar, Maidstone



DIG out those school ties and go back to the classroom with Maidstone Schools Reunited.

Every Thursday until October 29, the Beluga Bar in Bank Street is hosting special reunion nights for schools in the county town.

This week's celebration invites former students who left the following schools between 2003 and 2005: Maidstone Grammar School for Girls, Oakwood Park Grammar School and Valley Park Community School.

As well as the chance to catch up with old classmates, the nights will feature more blasts from the past in the form of music.

Beluga's resident DJs will be playing classic hits from the relevant years, transporting revellers back to the days of school discos and kissing behind the bike sheds.

Anyone who still has their school uniform is welcome to wear it as they get ready for a lesson in entertainment.

Entry is free before 11pm and costs £2.50 for ladies or £3.50 for men afterwards.

The event is for over-18s only and ID will be required. Event pages for upcoming nights can be found on Facebook.



MAIDSTONE LEISURE

Warblers invite you to come along in costume

EXPERIENCE a concert with a difference at St Lawrence's Church in Mereworth on Saturday.

The Marsh Warblers are a Kent choral and orchestral group, playing instruments and wearing costumes from the 18th century.

The free concert starts at 7pm. Please book by calling 01622 812214, 01732 843006 or 01622 814608.

Actors graduate into an iconic performance

A PROMISING young man gets more than he bargained for in a production by Trinity's Amateur Theatre Company.

Adapted from the legendary Oscar-winning film, The Graduate features the classic music of Simon and Garfunkel.

The show, for ages 12 and above, can be seen at the Trinity Theatre in Tunbridge Wells until Saturday May 16. Call 01892 678678 or visit www.trinitytheatre.net.

Exchange your night for bluegrass sounds

FANS of American bluegrass music should head to Maidstone's Exchange Studio on Friday.

The Buzzards with Sally Ironmonger will play traditional bluegrass and blues in the style of Bill Monroe and Flatt & Scruggs.

The concert starts at 7.30pm and tickets cost £12. Book at www.hazlittartscentre.co.uk or call 01622 758611.

Pair to play same piano in spectacular concert

TWO star pianists will bring Tonbridge Music Club's international concert series to a close in spectacular style.

Philip Moore and Simon Crawford-Phillips will have four hands on one piano at the Weald of Kent Grammar School for Girls at 8pm on Saturday. Tickets cost £15 or £5, from 01732 838698 and from John Adams Bookshop in Angel Walk. See www.tmc.org.uk.

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WOMEN seeking men

TAKE ME FOR WHO I AM

Hi I'm Sam, 22, looking for a relationship. I'm blonde, have brown eyes, love cosy nights in and cinema, looking to share a relationship. Box 447871

SWEET DEBS

Hopeful, happy, shy girl, 22, loves all the normal stuff about life, searching for a mature guy, 24-39, for loving friendship and happiness. Box 480373

SINGLE DADS WELCOME

Lovely single mum, 23, cuddly and curvy, 5ft6, blonde and blue-eyed, like a drink, animals, reading, cinema, looking for honest, trustworthy and caring male. Box 451249

MATCH OF THE DAY!

Fun-to-be-with, blonde female, 25, 5ft2, a woman who loves football! Enjoys going out and staying in, looking for a like-minded man, to be her soulmate. Box 446494

GETTING TO KNOW YOU...

Sociable girl, 28, loves pubs, social drinks, meeting new people & more, seeks similar male, 58-62, for a lasting relationship. Box 448756

GIVE AND TAKE IN LOVE

Loving loyal female, 30, blue eyes, brown hair, seeking LTR with male 30-35, 5ft6, no baggage, in the Maidstone area. Box 448471

SEEKING MR DADDY

Warm, kind and sincere woman, 31, lots of love and loyalty for the right person, seeking an honest genuine man with a good heart. Box 451004

GET A STRIKE

African, single mum, caring, adventurous, generous, 30yrs old, medium build. I love cinema/TV, music, bowling, shopping, cosy nights in. Box 882789

HAPPY SHOPPER!

Easygoing female, 32, enjoys shopping, football, eating out, cosy night in, WLTM loving, caring white male, 35-47, for long-term, loving relationship. No time-wasters. Box 444214

HORSES FOR COURSES...

Caring, loving, affectionate female, 30, 5ft2, blonde, likes walking, horse riding, animals, seeks affectionate male, 30-40, for lasting, loving relationship. Box 384013

CARING, CONSIDERATE, HOPEFULLY YOURS

Lovely young lady, 33, 5ft8, cuddly larger build, single mum, seeking kind, caring, honest and genuine man for fun/friendship... hopefully more. Box 450371

CHATHAM UP!

Pretty black female, 32, tall, loves watching football, shopping, travel, seeking tall, white, loving male, 34-47, for LTR. Chatham. Box 437778

MEND A BROKEN HEART

Single mum, 37, fun-loving, been hurt in past, looking for nice, genuine guy for hopeful happiness - no time wasters! Box 908053

BLONDE AMBITION

Bubbly, cuddly, blonde single mum, 39, 5ft6, likes cars, reading, pubs, cosy nights in, having a laugh, looking for that right male for LTR. Box 905614

CUTE AS CAN BE

Cute, single mum of 4, 38yrs old, Kent-based, into most things, looking for a loving and caring male, 38-42, for a LTR. Box 446684

DON'T LET ME DOWN

Pretty black female, 38, 5ft4, like football, socialising and cooking, looking for a loving and caring male, 38-42, for a LTR. Box 446684

ENTHUSIASM ENCOURAGED!

Lovely pretty big-busted lady, 39, medium build, 5ft5, lots of energy! likes the gym, reading, new experiences! seeking a nice man for potential exciting relationship! Box 446724

GALLOP AHEAD!

Maidstone-based woman, 36, 5ft5, slim, blue eyes. I'm caring, honest and have 4 children. I enjoy drives and horse riding and WLTM honest, reliable man. Box 451311

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THE SIMPLE THINGS...

I like reading/writing, going out, music. Seeking kind, genuine, honest chap; I'm a 40y old woman who enjoys the simple things in life. Box 446542

JOINED AT THE HIP

Sociable petite girl with great smile, 40, blonde, sociable, love football! Looking for fun guy with great SOH for inseparable partnership. Box 880343

TIME TO LIVE AGAIN

Lovely 40y old mum, average build, brown hair, blue eyes, own house, loves walking, going out, the usual! Seeking male for long-term/serious relationship. Box 438102

A NICE BOTTLE OF WINE

Lovely, glossy blonde, 39y old, petite, bubbly and loving, enjoys theatre, music and eating out. WLTM a professional, loving and tactile male for a relationship. Box 442551

NO TIES

Lovely, bored, professional Tunbridge Wells Asian lady, 40, WLTM slim, curly, solvent, professional white male 40-50 for company, fun, love and laughter. Box 443573

WHERE LOVE TAKES US

Attractive woman with a great personality to go with, looking to meet a fit, tall, well-built black male, 35-55, for fun times and hopefully romance. Box 450650

A HEART FULL OF LOVE

Nice looking, 41y old mixed race female, likes cinema, walks, eating out, bowling. WLTM a genuine white male with GSOH for a fun filled friendship/relationship. Box 450483

A FAIRY TALE ENDING

Easy-going blonde animal lover, 41, easy-going and friendly, enjoys eating out, cinema and pubs, looking for a loyal, caring and funny man, 35-45. Box 451079

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MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

Good looking woman, 37, 5ft2, brown hair/eyes, 2 kids. Looking for new friends and hopefully someone special. Box 446609

WISHFULLY YOURS

Loving female, 37, 5ft2, brown hair, slim, looking for honest, caring male with GSOH; for friendship, leading to more. Ashford. Box 449915

SEIZE THE DAY

Loving female, 36, 5ft4, brown hair, green eyes, likes socialising, staying in, seeks genuine male for friendship and more. Box 428666

MEND A BROKEN HEART

Single mum, 37, fun-loving, been hurt in past, looking for nice, genuine guy for hopeful happiness - no time wasters! Box 908053

BLONDE AMBITION

Bubbly, cuddly, blonde single mum, 39, 5ft6, likes cars, reading, pubs, cosy nights in, having a laugh, looking for that right male for LTR. Box 905614

CUTE AS CAN BE

Cute, single mum of 4, 38yrs old, Kent-based, into most things, looking for a loving and caring male, 38-42, for a LTR. Box 446684

DON'T LET ME DOWN

Pretty black female, 38, 5ft4, like football, socialising and cooking, looking for a loving and caring male, 38-42, for a LTR. Box 446684

ENTHUSIASM ENCOURAGED!

Lovely pretty big-busted lady, 39, medium build, 5ft5, lots of energy! likes the gym, reading, new experiences! seeking a nice man for potential exciting relationship! Box 446724

TLC ON OFFER FOR THE RIGHT PERSON!

Blonde, blue eyed woman, 44, fun-loving, looking for Mr Right. I love going out, nights in, movies, walking, local gigs. WLTM the right man for TLC. Box 880280

LOOKING FOR LTR

Single mum, petite, 44, brown hair/eyes, looking to share my life with a nice, man, a Russian man would be great! I like cinema, pubs, music. Box 451373

THIS STATE OF INDEPENDENCE

Hard-working female, 41, 5'4", bubbly, independent woman, love to laugh, socialising with friends, looking for independent man who values TLC. Box 414156

COULD IT BE YOU?

Hi I'm 44, slim, 5ft4, a redhead, love nights out, socialising, looking for friendship initially and hopefully more later on. Box 889800

A FINE BOTTLE OF WINE

Young looking, 45, long hair, slim, seeking male for friendship and maybe more with the right man. Box 442551

HERE AND NOW

Outgoing lady, 50, enjoys walks along the beach, nights out and in with a quiet bottle of wine, sees man to love forever. Box 449524

THE REAL THING

Lively blonde lady, 52, brown hair/blue eyes, 5ft4, fair hair, a smoker, loves music, going out, cooking, gardening, seeking similar loving, caring, honest male. Box 417100

LOVING IT LARGE

Smart petite lady, 45, long hair, slim, seeking male for friendship, looking for a good guy with similar interests. Box 448793

NOTHING TO KNOW UNTIL YOU CALL...

Young looking, hard working 53y old living in East Sussex. I am a happy, caring person with GSOH. Non-smoker. Box 429071

COME ON DOWN!

Honest, bubbly female, 45, long hair, slim, enjoys walking, cinema, socialising; seeks honest, friendly chap for friendship leading to more. Box 882693

SMART MOVE

Spontaneous female, 45, medium build, blue/green eyes, grows up children, beach walks, relaxing, reading, wine/beer, seeks similar male for friendship/more. Box 430854

LET'S SEE WHAT HAPPENS!

Smart petite lady, 56, 5ft4, tall, blonde hair, green eyes, likes restaurants, theatre, travel; a good listener, seeks honest guy with similar interests. Box 448785

SHOULD I TALK?

Intelligent lady, 55, 5ft6, large build, looking for a nice, genuine male who enjoys theatre, meals, laughter, music, relaxing and good conversation. Box 446445

A COMPANION FOR LIFE?

Blonde lady, 56, 5ft5, medium build, attractive, devoted ready to start dating again and seeking male who loves travel, theatre, walks, cinema and more. Box 448449

MAYBE YOU'RE THE ONE?

Hi I'm Mandi, chocolate brown hair, blue eyes, loves football, 48, seeking human male (preferably) for nights out, socialising, clubbing, meals, lots of laughs and much more. Box 425952

BE MY FRIEND AND LOVER

Honest new to the area, 57, 5ft5, slim, attractive blonde, seeking a man for a serious relationship and lasting happiness. Box 449587

WALKS ALONG THE COAST

Honest & sincere female, 58, tall, GSOH, loves country pubs, coasts, cinema, seeking a man who's a match for me with GSOH for relationship. Box 441622

I HAVE A DREAM

Blonde, bubbly curvy female, 59, looks younger, fun to be with, honest, seeks caring male to be with, a good friend. Box 451361

HAPPY AS ME

Fun-to-be-with, happy, contented lady, 60, 5ft4, I enjoy theatre, dining out and having friends round for a meal, gardening, pets. Box 882812

THE GOOD THINGS IN LIFE

59y old young-at-heart, loving woman, I am hoping to meet a kindred spirit who loves animals, going for walks and the romantic side of life. Box 900143

ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE

Art-loving 40y old, 5ft5, brown hair/eyes, into motorcycles and weight-lifting, looking for a trustworthy female for friendship to start off with, then who knows? Box 448928

HIYA

I'm a cute and laid-back guy, 41, 5ft8, short hair, athletic, very tactile, loving and spontaneous, likes shopping, travelling, eating in/out, hate football! Brighton. Box 450614

LOVE ON THE DANCEFLOOR

Outgoing, young-minded male, 47, 5ft7, likes war games, books, cinema, castles, places of interest, seeking similar woman to boogie on the dancefloor. Box 447305

Women seeking women

FUN AND MAYBE MORE

Hi I'm 37, new to town and would love to meet some genuine companions to socialise with and go out and have some fun. Box 880564

HOMEY SORT

Hi there, I'm looking for a kind, gentle partner, a homely woman, with GSOH. The female 56 and enjoy cinema, reading, antiques, gardening, music. Box 451451

CHOOSE ME!

Happy young fit active 41y old, looking for a girl to treat well and make happy... laid-back, relaxed and happy. Box 880495

NEW TO THE AREA

Warm-hearted, kind, honest, affectionate guy, 43, 5ft10, professional, caring, honest and with GSOH, WLTM attractive, caring, loving lady to enjoy nights in and out together. Box 448556

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06/05/09

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A Golden line-up at Lounge on the Farm



ON THE LIST: Golden Silvers will be at the festival

INFECTIOUSLY-catchy hitmakers Golden Silvers are among the latest batch of bands and artists to be added to the Lounge on the Farm line-up.

The London trio – behind the three-minute piece of pop perfection that is True Romance – will play the Canterbury three-dayer alongside the likes of Casiokids, Son Of Dave, A Hawk And A Hacksaw and Josh Weller.

Two Kent favourites have also been con-

■ BY SIMON ROBINSON

firmed for Lounge 2009 – with punk upstarts Underground Heroes and the joyous Kid Harpoon set to take to the Farm.

Organisers behind the Merton Farm festival, now in its fourth year, said there were more top acts to be announced.

LOTF's Matt Gough said: "We're really happy with the line-up this year."

"As ever we've been picking off the bands we've been listening to the most so it's very

much representative of our current tastes.

"And we'd like to think we have pretty good tastes. It's worked so far."

"We do have a Saturday headliner yet to announce but it's not quite confirmed yet."

Lounge on the Farm has quickly grown into one of the country's biggest little festivals, largely thanks to its focus on the experience rather than just the music.

The Farm offers a range of activities to keep the children entertained, food and drink sourced locally and a host of non-music performers.

Mr Gough added: "We're offering something completely different to a festival where everything is just about the headliners on the bill."

"There's such quality throughout our line-up we're quite happy without having to enter that particular rat race."

Lounge runs from Friday, July 10 to Sunday, July 12.

Last year's sell-out festival saw hundreds of top bands and artists perform across six stages, ranging from the Cow Shed to the Sheep Dip.

The line-up boasted the likes of Art Brut, The Coral, New York Dolls, Black Kids and Mystery Jets.

For more information visit www.loungonthefarm.co.uk.

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THE search is on for a 'real woman' to be the face of bottled water brand Willow.

Willow was the official water of the Britain's Next Top Model series and is a favourite with celebrities. Now the company is hunting for a fresh beauty to front its national marketing campaign.

Send a head-and-shoulder shot and contact details, along with a statement of no more than 30 words saying why you love being a natural beauty, to willowwater@brazenzpr.com by May 22.

Cordial invitation to try a delicious new flavour

GET ready for a very British summer with Bottlegreen's new Classic Variety Cordials range.

Wash down those picnics and barbecues with Williams Pear & Elderflower, Blackberry & Russet Apple and Cox's Apple & Plum, all created using an array of natural ingredients.

Bottlegreen's Classic Variety Cordials are available from Sainsbury's, Waitrose, Tesco, independent retailers and at www.ocado.com, priced from £2.49.

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HELP wildlife while you wash with the RSPB's new Skinner Dipper bath and shower products.

The fun and fresh range contains no palm oil, the production of which has destroyed vast areas of rainforest, or phosphates which cause major problems for rivers and wetlands. All the profits from sales will go directly into the conservation work of the RSPB.

Prices start at £3.50 and the range can be bought at www.rspbshop.co.uk.

Burberry price cuts are truly heaven scents

FANS of Burberry fragrances are in luck with Lloyds Pharmacy's special offer this month.

Burberry Summer 08 Man usually retails at £29 for 100ml, but the pharmacy chain is offering it at a reduced price of £19. There is a £9 saving on Burberry Summer 08 Woman, with 50ml bottles being reduced to £18.

Both offers are available until May 26. Visit www.lloydspharmacy.com to find your nearest store.

Bite into Continental treats at the market

ENJOY a taste of the Continent at a French market in Tunbridge Wells this weekend.

Shoppers can pick up authentic and delicious French produce as this popular market returns. It will be held in the Upper Pantiles from 10am to 4pm on Saturday and Sunday.

Parking can be found off Mayor York's Road. For more information about events at The Pantiles visit the website at www.thepantilesonline.co.uk.

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This fabulous twin-centre package is the perfect introduction to Australia and offers amazing value for money.

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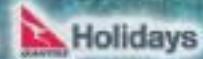
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Jordan reveals its ancient secrets

■ BY KELLY MACNAMARA

WE are perched high above the valley in the magnificent Dana Nature Reserve, looking west across the vast Dana Valley towards the horizon where Jordan comes to an end.

Jordan's story is a complex one. Positioned at the crossroads of inter-continental trade routes, it has been an important conquest for many an ambitious empire. All the big hitters of the ancient world – Babylonians, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Persians and finally the British – ruled it at one time or another.

Today, Jordan is an oasis of calm in a region racked by bitter dispute. It is encircled by instability, with Iraq on its north-east border, Israel and the Palestinian territories to the west and Syria in the north.

Dana's wonderful Rummana Campsite on the 76,000-acre reserve is home to about 600 species of plants, 37 species of mammals and 190 species of birds, and is the perfect place to discover the wilder side of Jordan.

Arriving after a sumptuous lunch at the Dana Guesthouse, which included a mouth-watering selection of local cuisine and jaw-dropping views, I travelled with a small group to the campsite on a remote plateau with its cluster of sail-white tents surrounded by serene red mountains.

Our host is Saleh, a Bedouin whose eloquence is matched by his evident enchantment with the place where his family has lived for generations.

He takes me on a short hike rich with observations: which rock to climb for the best views; the onion-like plant favoured by local hedge-



OASIS OF CALM: The dramatic landscape of the Dana Valley in Jordan is revealed to visitors by Bedouin guides

hogs; a badger sett; the paw print of a lynx in the dust.

My next stop is another of Jordan's mysteries – the ancient city of Petra.

Built by the industrious Nabatean people, this legendary city deep inside a narrow desert gorge once dominated the trading routes of ancient Arabia, sheltering caravans laden with Indian spices and African ivory.

Walking through corridors of sheer rock torn open in a prehistoric earthquake, I am struck by the otherworldliness of the place.

A steep climb in the murderous heat is rewarded by the ethereal monastery, and a chilled drink at a mountain-top cafe.

My bed for the night awaits amid the whispering mountains of Wadi Rum, in south-west Jordan. This is Lawrence of Arabia country: rugged, silent and awe-inspiring.

After a few days' camping in Jordan's wild, arid interior, it is time to get my feet wet.

Heading south, I don a snorkel to explore the Red Sea coral reef and potter around this colourful underwater garden for an afternoon, before coming up for a fish lunch.

My final destination is water of a less hospitable kind. Circled by a glittering necklace of salt crystals, the Dead Sea is a cruel irony in a country with such water problems. Dense with salt, you cannot drink it or swim in it, and the only creatures able to live in it are two hardy species of bacteria.

Walking in, your legs are pushed from under you and you bob about like a cork.

Conflict may be more than a minor character in Jordan's grand narrative, but its warm, sanguine people and extraordinary landscape are the real story.

FACT FILE: JORDAN

Time difference	+ 2/3 hours (GMT)
Language	Arabic
Capital	Amman
Population	4.4 million
Religion	Majority Sunni Muslims
Currency	Dinar
Climate	Arid

Travel facts

Kelly Macnamara was a guest of the Jordan Tourism Board and flew direct to Amman from Heathrow with bmi, which costs from £494 return. Regional connections to London from Aberdeen, Glasgow and Manchester cost from about £80 return.

BMI reservations: 0870 6070 555 and www.flybmi.com
Tour operator Exodus offers a nine-day Jordan trip to Petra, Wadi Rum, Red Sea and Dead Sea from £599, land-only price.

Exodus reservations: 0845 863 9600 and www.exodus.co.uk

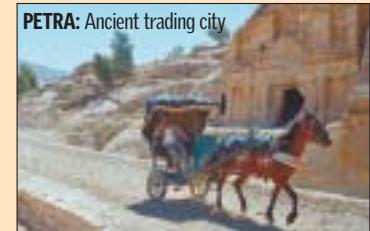
Jordan Tourism Board enquiries: 020 7371 6494 and www.visitjordan.com

You can book most camping spots, including Dana, through The Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature website (www.rscn.org.jo).

Contact Mzied for details of Wadi Rum camping (www.mzied.com)

For more information about the Kempinski Ishtar, visit www.kempinski-deadsea.com

PETRA: Ancient trading city



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RACE TO WITCH MOUNTAIN (PG)



When a Las Vegas taxi-driver picks up two runaway teenagers, he discovers they have supernatural powers and finds himself caught up in the middle of a magical adventure.

MONSTERS VS ALIENS (PG)



When Susan Murphy (Reese Witherspoon) grows to 49ft 11in, she is taken to a secret government compound that houses a selection of monsters who are called upon to save the world.

Hollywood hunk loves his life as a family man

■ BY ELLIE GENOWER

TURNING 40 is reason enough for many people to have a mini mid-life crisis.

But Matthew McConaughey, who celebrates the big 4-0 this November, isn't too worried.

In fact, this laidback Hollywood hunk is pretty pleased with the way life is going, especially being a dad to nine-month-old Levi, his son with Brazilian model Camila Alves.

"I look at it as like they're new chapters," he says. "Finding a woman I want to settle down with was a new chapter; having Levi – a new chapter, same book."

McConaughey's real life is a far cry from his latest character in new comedy *Ghosts Of Girlfriends Past*.

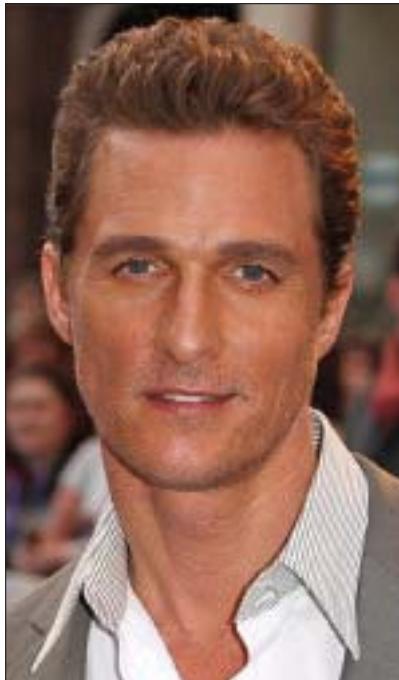
He plays womanising celebrity photographer Connor, who thinks nothing of breaking up with multiple women on a conference call while arranging his next date.

"Connor is really not out to hurt anyone, he just wants to have a good time," says the actor. "But he's also a guy who has lost his way and doesn't know it."

Connor's romantic scepticism proves to be a bit of a downer on the eve of his brother Paul's wedding and doesn't impress his houseful of guests, including his childhood friend Jenny (Jennifer Garner), who has no patience with Connor's philandering ways.

But that night Connor is visited by the ghost of his late Uncle Wayne (Michael Douglas), who shows Connor where he's going wrong by taking him through a revealing past, present and future odyssey of failed relationships.

"The ghosts were a big unrealistic thing, but that's just one of the things that made this one original," says the star, who is well known for



LAID BACK: Leading man Matthew McConaughey

his roles in rom-coms like *Fool's Gold* and *Failure To Launch*.

McConaughey admits he isn't too bothered about tying the knot with Camila.

"Am I getting married in the future? Not today," he says. "I don't have any plans for it."

With several movies under his belt and a sex symbol image to boot, he has had to get used

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to increased interest in his personal life, especially since baby Levi came along.

"I personally don't choose to retreat or hide out," he says. "I didn't know what the hell stardom was about and didn't expect it," he adds. "I like how it's going. I'm happy."

Things may have changed for the actor in the past 20 years, but he says Levi's arrival hasn't altered his way of life.

He seems pleased to be able to incorporate Levi into his often-nomadic lifestyle.

"We've been to Brazil twice, Italy and France and Germany. And we've gone 7,300 miles on a road-trip in the Airstream (caravan) for 42 days, so we've had a lot of the same adventures we would have had before Levi came along, we've just brought him along with us."

GHOSTS OF GIRLFRIENDS PAST Certificate PG

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YOUR TV REVIEW

■ BY TOM BETTS

THE BIG BANG THEORY

Channel 4, 9.30pm, Thursday

I STUMBLED upon The Big Bang Theory about a year ago, after Channel 4 started screening it on Thursday nights.

Shamelessly under-promoted, this remains one of the better comedy shows out there, and has gathered a real cult following in the States.

Centring on the lives of two college super-brained, flat-sharing geeks, with IQs that make Carol Vorderman look like a village idiot, the pair get into the usual sitcom scrapes.

They juggle their love lives, Klingon Boggle marathons and trying to impress the super hot girl next door, Penny, a waitress with one eye on Hollywood and the other on Leonard, the show's principal lead.

Very much a foil to move the story along, Penny takes the geeks where no geeks have gone before.

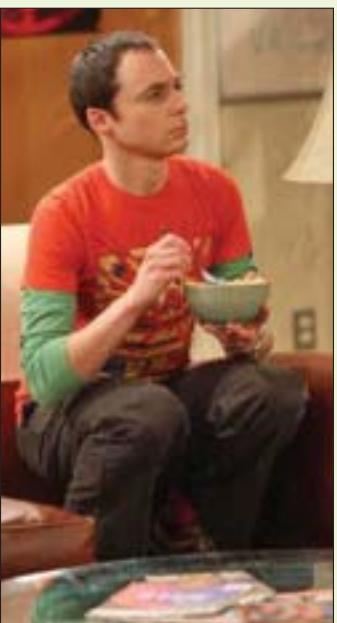
It's Jim Parson's portrayal of the spiky and prodigious Dr Sheldon Cooper that steals the show, though.

Neurotic, exacting to a fault, and with the kind of waspish nature that is often so bizarre it borders on psychotic, it is the kind of turn that steals almost every show – that would steal any show – and should net the actor a gong or two come the next award season.

Even more remarkable is the fact he is actually aged 36 and not once looks out of place playing the role of the physician still in his early 20s.

Thrown into the mix to keep things interesting are two more oddballs.

There is the sex-obsessed and Jewish mother dominated Howard Wolowitz, who is never one to sidestep sleazing his way into any female's affections and Rajesh Koothrappali, the shy one who cannot utter a word.



BIG BANG: Jim Parsons is simply excellent in his portrayal of uber geek Dr Sheldon Cooper

to any woman he finds attractive.

I can't say this is a total blinder, and the canned laughter can be a little hard to put up with, but TBBT is certainly as good as any other light comedy coming out of America right now.

It's short, snappily written and improving all the time.

It's hard to see that this is going to appeal to anyone who is not into sarcastic fast-moving sitcoms but those who like that sort of thing will most likely appreciate this.

It also has the best theme tune on TV, sung by Barenaked Ladies, a band born to perform such a thing if ever there was.

Perhaps it is the geek, and not the meek, who shall inherit the Earth.

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YOUR WEEK'S HOROSCOPE

BY RUSSELL GRANT



AQUARIUS (Jan 21-Feb 19)

YOUR conscience is really starting to bother you. Maybe it's time to explain to a colleague where you went wrong. Of course, your relationship will undergo tremendous strain as a result, but at least you'll be giving them a chance to heal. Your financial picture is looking good.

• To find out more about what the stars have in store call Russell on **Aquarius** 09067-531762

TAURUS (Apr 21-May 21)

ARGUMENTS over politics and religion could tear a relationship apart. Avoid such subjects like the plague. If you're in love with someone whose beliefs are radically different, the two of you may have to get counselling. You can no longer avoid the elephant in the room.

• To find out more about what the stars have in store call Russell on **Taurus** 09067-531753

LEO (Jul 24-Aug 23)

HORRIBLE work or living conditions prompt you to make a change. It may be necessary to move to an unfamiliar area. Although you hate being uprooted like this, it's better than stewing in your own juices. A pay raise or lucrative job could finally be awarded to you.

• To find out more about what the stars have in store call Russell on **Leo** 09067-531756

SCORPIO (Oct 24-Nov 22)

ABUSIVE behaviour can no longer be tolerated. You've got a high threshold for this kind of nonsense, but enough is enough. When you face up to this tormentor, they'll back down. If you have to resort to underhanded behaviour to make your point, do it; just don't get caught!

• To find out more about what the stars have in store call Russell on **Scorpio** 09067-531759

PISCES (Feb 20-Mar 20)

PEER pressure is rearing its ugly head. It looks as though you'll have to break ranks, if only as a way to cut costs. There's no point in going to restaurants or clubs you can't afford. If friends can't understand find more supportive companions. On the romantic front, you're making progress.

• To find out more about what the stars have in store call Russell on **Pisces** 09067-531763

GEMINI (May 22-Jun 22)

A HANG up could be undermining an intimate relationship. One or both of you needs to come to terms with this problem. Don't be afraid to get help. A costly home improvement project could finally be finished, and the results are impressive and add value to your living space.

• To find out more about what the stars have in store call Russell on **Gemini** 09067-531754

VIRGO (Aug 24-Sep 23)

A LOVE affair is heading for the rocks. Although it's fun delving into taboo areas, you need to consider how your actions are affecting innocent people. It's also possible you're developing an addiction to the person in question. Put some space between the two of you, if only short term.

• To find out more about what the stars have in store call Russell on **Virgo** 09067-531757

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 23-Dec 21)

COMPROMISING your values for the sake of fitting in is a big mistake. No matter how much you think you want a job, relationship or fame, walk away. Healthier options are on the horizon. For now, obey your conscience. An authority figure could reward your noble choice.

• To find out more about what the stars have in store call Russell on **Sagittarius** 09067-531760

ARIES (Mar 21-Apr 20)

POWER struggles are likely with an overbearing boss. No amount of flattery will help you get around them. You're better off following their orders and let the chips fall where they may. Avoid buying any gadgets, as you'll just have to return them later. Faulty equipment abounds.

• To find out more about what the stars have in store call Russell on **Aries** 09067-531752

CANCER (Jun 23-Jul 23)

A CONTROLLING friend, workmate or lover is getting on your nerves, assert yourself, before the entire relationship goes south. Continuing to give in to their demands is undermining your self esteem. Don't reveal somebody's secret, or you'll pay a hefty price for your indiscretion.

• To find out more about what the stars have in store call Russell on **Cancer** 09067-531755

LIBRA (Sep 24-Oct 23)

CONDITIONS at home have become unbearable. Your family is pressuring you to adopt values that make no sense for your lifestyle. It's more important to satisfy yourself than fit in. If that means suspending communications with certain relatives, so be it. Patience will be rewarded.

• To find out more about what the stars have in store call Russell on **Libra** 09067-531758

CAPRICORN (Dec 22-Jan 20)

YOUR overbearing behaviour is starting to chafe on family members. As much as you hate to admit it, you cannot save people from themselves. If somebody decides to take a dangerous path, get out of their way. If you're dealing with a youngster, try to see things from their view.

• To find out more about what the stars have in store call Russell on **Capricorn** 09067-531761

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CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

No86

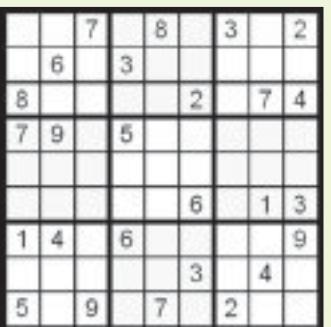
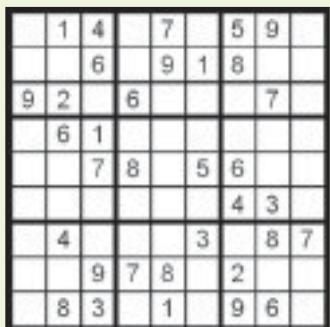
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Fill the grid so that every column, every row and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9

EASY

MEDIUM

HARD



CRYPTIC CLUES

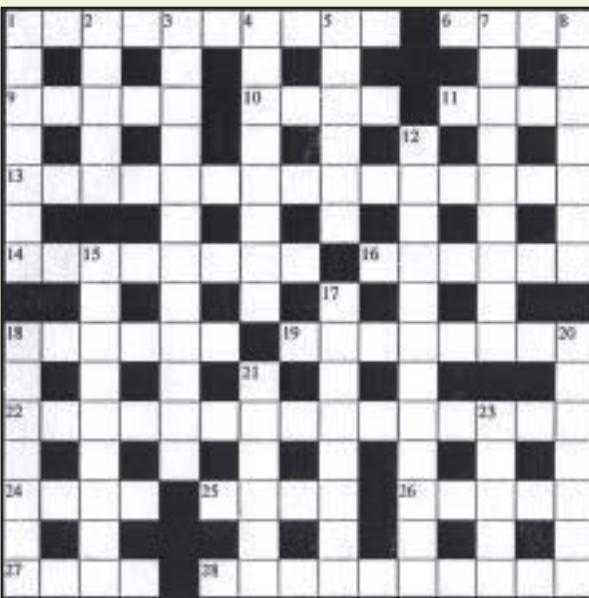
ACROSS

- 1 Live stroke in advance (10)
- 6 Which French duke had money? (4)
- 9 Go over again corn initially during harvest (5)
- 10 Drop off at twelve almost (4)
- 11 Tie at speed (4)
- 13 Handy drawing (9,6)
- 14 Contained in old records vicar Hal unearthed (8)
- 16 Lady in network (6)
- 18 Indian child in nursery (6)
- 19 Polly got round multilingual (8)
- 22 One who is shy pressing only one flower (9,6)
- 24 Reported girl with wrong cat (4)
- 25 You had resistance leaving trio (4)
- 26 Excited Ada up from Italian city (5)
- 27 Expedition leader went inside parched nest (4)
- 28 Song rather discordant not designed to go the distance (5-5)

DOWN

- 1 Clerical overhead? (7)
- 2 In a terrific hurry to get a cape (5)
- 3 Bringing out for at least the second time (12)
- 4 Hurried, say, on a road to refuge (8)
- 5 Open end of tube (6)
- 7 Strained one French note (9)
- 8 Did include square revolutionary who had been abandoned (7)
- 12 Thin bird, one getting into the water with nothing on (6-6)
- 15 Space allowed for removal of obstructions (9)
- 17 Long-jumper, not MP, becoming itinerant minstrel (8)
- 18 Actors went first and changed positions (7)
- 20 In laboratory, measure speed of small bird? (7)
- 21 The last Henry's position (6)
- 23 Eland struggled weighed down (5)

SCRIBBLE HERE



QUICK CLUES

ACROSS

- 1 Incomparable (10)
- 6 Bible passage (4)
- 9 Deceive (5)
- 10 Conceited (4)
- 11 Anniversary of death (4)
- 13 Veal cutlet (6)
- 14 Condenn openly (8)
- 16 Mixture (6)
- 18 Cheerful (6)
- 19 Armorial (8)
- 22 Very pure (6,4,5)
- 24 Milky gem (4)
- 25 Gold-coloured (4)
- 26 Drunkard (5)

27 Always (4)

28 Famous (10)

DOWN

- 1 Not overcome (7)
- 2 Avoid (5)
- 3 Not often visited (12)
- 4 Languishing with amorous desire (8)
- 5 Elijah's successor (6)
- 7 Acted fraudulently (9)
- 8 Wholly (7)
- 12 Effervescent drink (7,5)
- 15 Wink (9)
- 17 Pear-tree (anag.) (8)
- 18 Mandible (7)
- 20 Gladened (7)
- 21 Industrial action (6)
- 23 Computer data (5)

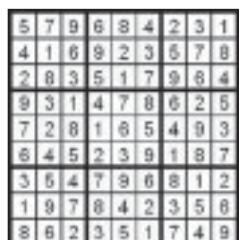
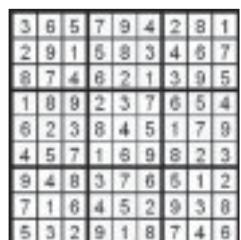
LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS

SUDOKU SOLUTIONS No86

EASY

MEDIUM

HARD



Answers to all of this week's quizzes can be found on our website

CRYPTIC SOLUTION No85

ACROSS: 1 Unequalled 6 Text 9 Bluff 10 Vain 11 Obit 13 Wiener schnitzel 14 Denounce 16 Medley 18 Jocund 19 Heraldic 22 Whiter than white 24 Opal 25 Gift 26 Toper 27 Ever 28 Celebrated. **DOWN:** 1 Unbowed 2 Elude 3 Unrequited 4 Lovescick 5 Elisha 7 Embroidered 8 Totally 12 Mineral water 15 Nictitate 17 Repartee 18 Jawbone 20 Cheered 21 Strike 23 Input.

QUICK SOLUTION No86

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PROPERTY NEWS

Gloom hasn't lifted says builders' survey

THE latest State of Trade Survey from the Federation of Master Builders makes for gloomy reading.

It reports that a total of 73 per cent of small building firms have seen a decline in workloads. A further 66 per cent reported a decline for the commercial property sector in the first quarter of 2009. Although morale was reported to be poor with builders' expectations at a low level, there was one note of cheer.

In the non-residential public sector some 14 per cent of FMB builders saw their workloads increase.

Richard Diment, director-general of the FMB, said: "Given the weak economic outlook, the negative workload responses from FMB builders are hardly surprising as this general gloom surrounding the UK's future economic prospects convinces many companies to put expansions, moves, and new office building on hold for the foreseeable future."

The survey indicated there may be a slowing in the rate of decline in private housing, public non-residential new build, and public non-residential repair and maintenance.

Ways to help people up the property ladder

WARD Homes has reported a strong sales performance in the first three months of the year, adding to hopes that the worst of the economic downturn has passed.

The company has already sold 79 homes in 2009. The company says its success is down to competitive prices and deals to suit all kinds of buyers.

All but 10 homes have now been sold at Kings Hill, near West Malling, and just seven homes remain in the current phase at Eden Village, Sittingbourne.

Throughout the region, properties are selling at a rate of nearly two per week.

"We have seen a strong performance in terms of the number of homes sold and visitors to our sites in the last few months as more and more people realise that now could be the time to buy," said Tim Nabbs, sales director at Ward Homes.

"We have a number of ways to help our customers move up the property ladder.

"If you're a first time buyer you could move in for just 70 per cent of the price under the HomeBuy Direct scheme, which we operate in conjunction with the Government's Homes and Communities Agency."



Housing market shows signs of revival for buyers but not sellers

■ BY NICK AMES

BUYERS have been returning to the property market during the spring, according to a new survey.

The National Association of Estate Agents has seen a small increase in house sales.

This follows reports this week from the Council of Mortgage Lenders and HM Revenue & Customs who said lending and agreed sales were on the up.

However, the association has said the Chancellor Alistair Darling missed an opportunity to help the housing market in the Budget.

Signs the market was bottoming out have been approached cautiously in recent weeks, with experts warning the housing market is still in a fragile state.

However, the association research found the number of house hunters registering with estate agents was up 12 per cent, with the number of agreed sales per agent increased from eight to nine, from February to March.

The average house price, however, was 6.38 per cent lower than the actual asking price, although this appears to have drawn first-time buyers back into the market.

Association member Richard Copus said: "The market has definitely been showing signs of a revival in March. But like the weather, it is likely to be changeable and must be treated with caution."

Experts said the increased sales per agent were "the largest average figure for more than a year and a great source of optimism for the industry", with the number of house hunters at their highest levels for a year, indicating home buyer confidence was returning. However, the story for sellers was somewhat more pes-



SELLING UP: Experts warn the market is still in a fragile state despite a reported increase in the number of house hunters

simistic, with the average number of properties on estate agents books falling from 74 in February to 67 in March.

An association spokesman said: "This is a potentially worrying indicator, as it suggests that sellers are not confident of getting the best possible price for their property."

"It is likely to reflect a view that the period of consistent house price falls is coming to an end - meaning those with property to sell feel it might better serve their interests to delay for a number of months and try to catch an upturn."

Lee Bramzell, chief executive of PropertyIndex.com, said: "Over

recent months we have seen a steady trickle of positive news from across the housing industry, suggesting that buyers really are being tempted back into the market.

"While we still have a long way to go before we return to strong house price growth I believe the tide is beginning to turn."

"Many buyers now believe that the bottom of the market is approaching and as a result, they are starting to take action to ensure they don't miss out."

The association earlier said Mr Darling should have done more to help first time buyers returning to the market, and that his extension on the Stamp Duty threshold

will do little to encourage them to buy their first home.

Chris Brown, president said: "This is a token gesture that will be presented as a benefit to first-time buyers but is in reality irrelevant to two thirds of them."

"Our figures show that first-time buyers came back to the market in droves in January, making up 25 per cent of sales.

"The figure has only dipped slightly since then and in March was 23 per cent. The Chancellor's measures will do little to consolidate that resurgence in interest."

"If the number falls again next month then we will know that confidence is dropping in the wake of a botched Budget."

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**WEST MALLING £469,950**

Extended 5 double bedroom chalet bungalow. The ground floor extension incorporates a double bedroom, shower room and utility room which could be utilised as a kitchen.

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**MAIDSTONE £379,950**

A detached home with 4 double bedrooms, be-spoke fitted kitchen is open plan into dining room, living room and conservatory. Offers a utility room, shower room and bathroom.

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**MAIDSTONE O100 £175,000**

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**MAIDSTONE O100 £115,000**

A two bedroom home on the periphery of the town centre. The cul-de-sac is a retirement complex for the over 60's to retain independent living but have the security of warden assistance.

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**MAIDSTONE £115,000**

A two bedroom lower ground floor apartment situated in the town centre. There are two good size bedrooms, lounge, kitchen and bathroom. This property is offered with no forward chain

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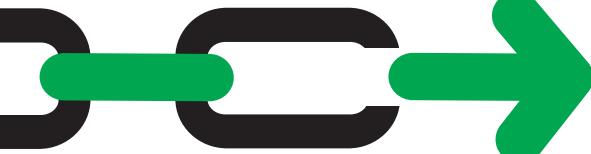
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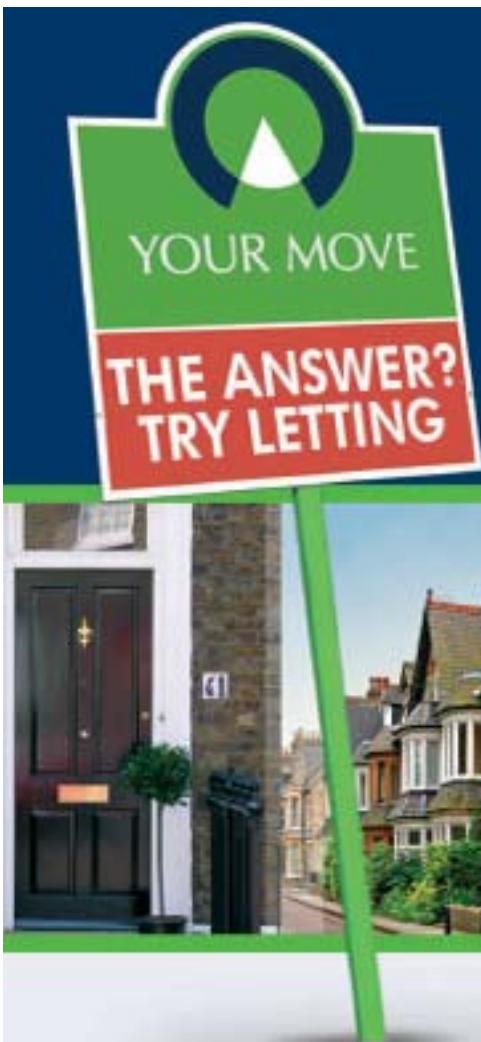


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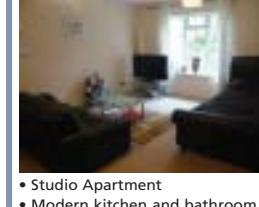
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Maidstone £219,995



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- En Suite to Master Bedroom
- Pretty courtyard garden

Maidstone £139,950



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- Cellar
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Larkfield £185,000



- 3 Bed Semi Detached Home
- Off Road parking for 4 Cars
- 15'11 x 9'6 Conservatory
- Double Glazing

Maidstone £125,000



- 2 Bedroom purpose built flat
- Ensuite to master bedroom
- 14'3' Lounge, Garage
- Viewing highly recommended

Maidstone £149,995



- 2 Bedroom First Floor Flat
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- Modern kitchen & bathroom
- Allocated parking space

Tovil £250,000



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- Tandem double Garage
- Modern Fitted Kitchen

Coxheath £215,000



- 3 Bed Semi Detached Home
- Modern Fitted Kitchen
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£114,995

This apartment has river views, lounge/diner, kitchen, bathroom and two bedrooms plus parking. A definite must see.

Maidstone



£135,000

Don't judge this book by its cover, a hallway leading to lounge, dining room and kitchen and three bedrooms to the first floor.

Maidstone



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Maidstone



Offers in excess of £160,000

3 bedroom family home has off road parking, lounge leading through to kitchen, cellar currently used as dining room and bathroom.

Maidstone



£174,995

Refurbished and renovated house is one to view, refitted kitchen, relaid carpets, replastered and redecorated rooms, replaced bathroom.

Larkfield



£180,000

Two bedroom top floor apartment that must be viewed. Lake views, parking and Ensuite bathroom. Surprisingly spacious.

Maidstone



£219,995

Unusual house, unique accommodation over two storeys, each of which is split level, garage and driveway.

Maidstone



£224,995

Converted ragstone bungalow occupies a good size plot including lawns and shingle areas, parking to the side.

Penenden Heath



£499,995

Detached family home, cul-de-sac position, executive home is offered for sale in Penenden Heath. Must be viewed to be appreciated fully.



Maidstone £600 PCM
Well presented 2 double bed house. Spacious living/dining area. Modern bathroom, good sized garden and off road parking. Available June.



Maidstone £775 PCM
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Maidstone £795 PCM

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Loose £850 PCM

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Maidstone £950 PCM
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Dartford £1,400 PCM

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MOTORS NEWS



Scrapage scheme dream deal options

ONE benefit of the Budget's £2,000 scrapage scheme is the decent discounts never available before on certain cars.

Nowhere is this more obvious than on BMW and Mini (pictured) models and there are even offers over and above the Government scheme.

Someone keen to upgrade to a new BMW, for instance, could get a 116i Sport for £242 a month, with zero deposit and immediately save money through the car's eco-friendly EfficientDynamics technology – on top of a total discount/grant of £3,260.



'Optimal Auris' brings more go and less gas

MOST manufacturers offer eco versions of key models, but Toyota is 'greening' whole car ranges after dismantling the internal combustion engine and reassembling it in new 'Optimal Drive' powertrains.

These save money and the conscience with apparently contradictory benefits: more power plus better economy with lower CO2 emissions/road tax, and are now available in revised Auris family hatch models (from £12,900).

The UK-built 131bhp 1.6-litre petrol option offers nine per cent better economy, eight per cent lower CO2 emissions and six per cent than before.



Octavia trouper stage comeback

HAVING upgraded mainstream Octavia versions in late 2008, Skoda has unveiled sporty vRS and rugged Scout facelifts.

The vRS option has been a huge success for the VW-owned Czech brand; 70 per cent have sold in the estate format as a cut-price performance load lugger to rival BMW and Audi's finest.

The Scout, with its rough and tough adds-ons, 4x4 and high-riding stance, has also been popular with those needing some go anywhere ability without big off-roader bodywork. Prices are to be confirmed.



IMPROVEMENT: The Hyundai i10 was launched with a 1.1 litre engine – that has now been replaced by a livelier and smoother 1.2 litre unit which takes the car to another level

Hyundai i10 catches up thanks to engine upgrade

HYUNDAI was seemingly so keen to deliver a pint-size recession-beating eco champ last spring that it forgot something – a decent engine.

The all-new i10's 1.1-litre debut petrol unit sizzled towards 62mph in a glacial 15.6 seconds, protesting all the while: 'I won't be hurried.'

It soured favourable first impressions, but the Korean marque put the record straight with a lightweight 1.2-litre replacement across the line-up last September.

Dubbed the 'Kappa', it produces good power low down the rev range, squeezing more from each increasingly precious drop of fuel and with lower emissions and just £35/year road tax.

It drives rather well too, with good response and refinement for this class and a more 'real world' 0-62mph in 12.8 seconds, better suited to cut and thrust urban driving and emerging from junctions.

Balancing ride quality and chassis dynamics is always tough for small cars, but the i10 does well and the 1.2 engine has transformed motorway refinement. You even relish driving the i10 cross-country – I can't say that about many city cars.

ROAD TEST

HYUNDAI i10

■ BY STEVE LOADER

STAR QUALITY

Driving appeal	★★★★★
Image	★★★★★
Space	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★
Running costs	★★★★★
Reliability	★★★★★
Green rating	★★★★★

Head and legroom for all and comfort levels are good and this high-roof car can be crammed like a van when rear seats are folded.

Some textured trimming looks cheap though and the steering wheel feels low rent on Classic and Comfort spec; I would not normally advocate going for any top spec model, but a leather-covered wheel is just one luxury to recommend our flagship i10 Style test car (£8,195).

It costs £1,100 more than poverty spec Classic, but you get alloys, heated front seats, a storage tray beneath the passenger seat, an electric sunroof and rear spoiler.

That's on top of generous standard kit including air-con and front electric windows, plus some thoughtful design.

The boot, for instance, is not only spacious for this class, but has two bins beneath the floor as well as a compartmentalised tray above the space saver spare wheel – plenty of stowage to capture those odds 'n' sods that accumulate.

It is a motoring package a long way from the Hyundai of five years ago, yet still has the famous five-year warranty and value for money that kept the brand in the game while catching up with European carmakers.



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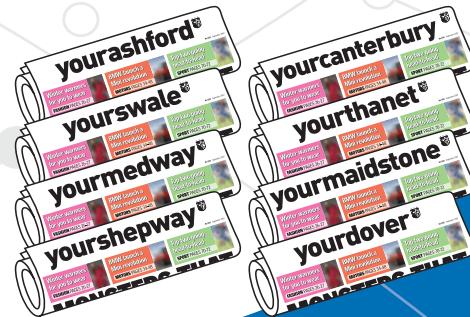
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USED CAR ROUND-UP:

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FIAT PANDA



FIAT'S baby was deservedly European Car of the Year in 2004. It shows that a space efficient interior does not have to go with a dull utilitarian exterior – the Panda could function as a van, but looks far more interesting. The distinctive five-door Italian is also fun to drive and cheap to tax, insure and fuel, yet features cutting-edge technology. A lively turbodiesel option – averaging 65+mpg – rugged 4x4 version and hot 100hp model add to the line-up's attractions.

STAR QUALITY

Driving appeal	★★★★★
Looks and image	★★★★★
Space	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★
Running costs	★★★★★
Reliability	★★★★★
Quality	★★★★★

BUDGET ALTERNATIVES

SCRAPPING your old car in exchange for £2,000 towards a new one dominated motoring headlines in the latest Budget, but this still leaves some drivers short of cash to upgrade. Fortunately, the used market offers many used city cars and superminis and most are frugal; some even fall into the desirable £35/year road tax banding. Even if they don't, fuel savings should soon make you happier with trading up to or downsizing to something more in step with greener and more wallet-friendly motoring. Check this trio of alternative budget deals.

HYUNDAI GETZ



IT is ageing now, but the Getz signalled Hyundai's arrival on the European motor scene, with a thoroughly modern supermini. It does not excel in any area really, but neither does the Korean car fall short anywhere either. Available in three and five-door form with a five-year warranty, it also has some engines in road tax band-B, including an efficient diesel. Securing a good deal – with some warranty intact.

STAR QUALITY

Driving appeal	★★★★★
Looks and image	★★★★★
Space	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★
Running costs	★★★★★
Reliability	★★★★★
Quality	★★★★★

FORD KA



THOUGH given the chop this year, the original Ka remains in demand as a used budget buy. The engines are geriatric, but dependable and the quirky-looking three-door city car/supermini makes a good, distinctive and affordable runabout. There are plenty on the market to choose from and if it has a fault, then it is that the distinctive styling tends to attract women buyers – and put off the blokes – but it drives well, being based on a previous Fiesta.

STAR QUALITY

Driving appeal	★★★★★
Looks and image	★★★★★
Space	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★
Running costs	★★★★★
Reliability	★★★★★
Quality	★★★★★

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FINGERS CROSSED: Geoff Arnold is hoping for a full-time contract at Kent

Bowling coach wants full-time post at Kent

CRICKET

EXPERIENCED bowling coach Geoff Arnold hopes he has done enough with Kent's attack to be given a contract to work with the county's pace bowlers for the whole summer.

The former England fast bowler was released as Surrey's bowling coach at the end of last season and joined Kent as a bowling consultant in pre-season.

The 64-year-old's future at the club will be decided when director of cricket Graham Ford joins up with the Kent squad and Arnold hopes he will be given a chance to continue in the role.

He said: "I want to coach for as long as possible. Although I'm pushing the retirement age I don't want to retire because I feel I have still got a lot to offer the game.

"I am fit enough to do catching and fielding in practice so it's wait and see what Kent want to do really."

Kent's problems with extras last season, particularly no-balls, is something Arnold has been working on trying to eradicate during pre-season.

He said: "It is something we have been looking at, but I always believe it's a self-discipline thing, you have got to hit a mark but some bowlers don't do that and then wonder why they get hit for runs."

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 Gills boss Mark Stimson discusses the club's biggest games of the season



KOLPAK RETURN? Wayne Parnell says he is interested in a return to Kent after playing for South Africa in the World Twenty20 tournament in England during June

Parnell leaves door open for St Lawrence return

CRICKET

■ BY GLENN PEARSON

KENT'S new overseas fast bowler Wayne Parnell could return to the county after playing in the World Twenty20 with South Africa – but as a Kolpak player.

The South African international is expected to be named in the Proteas' side for the Twenty20 competition in England that begins on June 1, with his six-week contract at St Lawrence due to end on May 21.

The World Twenty20 ends with the show-piece final at Lord's on June 21 which, if agreed, would leave Parnell with a window to rejoin the county for the final three months of the season.

The 19-year-old left-arm fast bowler, who took 4-79 and scored a brisk 69 in Kent's first innings in the County Championship against Essex, told this newspaper he would be happy to return to St Lawrence later in the summer.

"I am supposed to leave on May 21 as I'm hoping to make the South Africa World T20 squad later on so it will give me a few days before that

starts," he said. "After that I will reassess where I am. If I do well there is a possibility I will return, but we will have to see. It's a good set-up at Kent with a good bunch of guys with a good mixture of young and experienced players so hopefully I can do well."

Kent's chairman, George Kennedy, said that signing Parnell after the World Twenty20 is over was something the county are looking into.

Although, Rob Key's inclusion in the England's squad for the competition means Kent may have to find an overseas opening batsman to fill in, but Kennedy hopes Parnell could return, potentially as a Kolpak player.

"It's certainly in the pipeline," he said. "The only problem is if we bring in another overseas player once he has gone and we are looking into that for more than one reason. If he did come

back it could be as a Kolpak player, but these things are becoming more complex. On the evidence of one game though, he is the kind of player we want at the club."

Having been watched by Kent's exiled director of cricket, Graham Ford, Parnell was approached by the county with a proposition to join for an initial six-week stint.

The young quick bowler, who made his One-Day International debut in Australia in January, jumped at the chance to play county cricket as a way of preparing for this summer's Twenty20 tournament.

He said: "During the third One-Day International against Australia in South Africa, the club contacted my agent.

"He phoned me after the game to tell me Kent were interested because Stuart Clark had been re-called by the Aussies. With the World T20 being in England it will hopefully give me experience of bowling on these types of wickets.

"I have got to get used to English conditions and the English ball."

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Walker: Cut-backs have shattered us as a team

FOOTBALL

■ BY TOM HOWARD

MAIDSTONE United may have easily avoided relegation this season, but joint-manager Alan Walker believes this season was just as energy sapping as last year's relegation fight.

It has been a turbulent year for the club, who only secured their place in the division for 2008/2009 with a 1-0 win at Folkestone Invicta the previous year.

The campaign started very positively with talk of reaching the play-offs after signing players such as former Gillingham defender Ian Cox and strikers Meshach Nugent, James Pinnock and Lloyd Blackman.

The Stones made a promising start and quickly found themselves firmly in the play-off positions. However, after a failed stadium grant bid to the Football Foundation to bring the club back to Maidstone, chairman Paul Bowden-Brown put the club up for sale.

Maidstone were unable to compete with their impressive start as cut-backs were enforced, eventually seeing them finish 15th.

Walker said: "Looking back on the season I think it was just as frantic as the last. There was never any danger of us getting relegated and on some occasions we flirted with the play-offs.



Picture STEVE TERRELL

PREPARATIONS: Maidstone United management duo Alan Walker (left) Lloyd Hume (right) are already working to put together a squad for next season after a turbulent year

"When we were hit by the financial cut-backs and restraints it shattered us as a team and took a lot out of all the players. To be fair to the players we got on with the job and kept going right until the end of the season."

Despite a disappointing second half to the season, which saw the club record just three league wins since December, Walker believes there are positives to take from the campaign.

He said: "Obviously the amount of young players, which we have fielded and have done well shows the future is bright. The younger players grabbed their opportunity and showed what they are capable of."

Walker and Hume were given a reduced budget for next season last month and work has already started. The management duo are yet to decide who they will release.

Ebbsfleet United defender Peter Hawkins, who was on-loan at the Stones this season, remains a summer transfer target. However, Walker admitted he is unsure whether the former Wimbledon defender will be able to drop down to semi-professional football for a whole season. He added: "We would really like to sign Peter but we will have to wait and see. Peter has always been a professional footballer so he will have to see if it is viable to play part-time."



Picture BOB HAYTON
EXIT: Maidstone failed to make the sevens semis

Kamikaze triumphed at Sevens tournament

INVITATIONAL side Kamikaze ran out comfortable winners in front of a big crowd at the Kent Sevens tournament on Sunday.

The team, made up of players drawn from all across the county, beat Orpington outfit Olaf's Axes 33-19 in the final at Canterbury's Merton Lane.

A total of 15 teams, including Maidstone took part in the event, which divided them into three pools of five teams. After the round robin games Kamikaze, Dover and 2008 champions Tunbridge Wells made it through to the semi-finals as group winners. The last four was completed by Olaf's Axes, who were the best runners-up.

The semi-finals were one-sided affairs, with Wells' hopes of defending the trophy extinguished by Olaf's Axes. Kamikaze swept Dover aside in the other game.

Olaf's Axes looked to be heading for glory in the final as they reached half-time 19-7 ahead. But such leads can be easily eroded in sevens and so it proved as Kamikaze roared back with some superb running rugby which tore the opposition apart.

In the Plate competition, Warlingham beat RAF Spitfires after both finished runners-up.



GOLD: The Pegasus boys put on a good show as they returned this week having won gold in Slovenia

Gymnastics club came back from Slovenia with gold

GYMNASICS

PEGASUS Gymnastics excelled at an international competition in Slovenia with both boys and girls teams finishing on the medal rostrum.

The Maidstone club has developed a close relationship with the Slovenian Federation, which invited teams from around Europe for a week of training. It culminated with the Salumnar Cup, an international competition which was extended to girls for the first time.

The boys' competition was fierce, with a team of experienced gymnasts from Austria the favourites. Pegasus' hopes of victory appeared to be over after they trailed the Austrians by a huge margin of almost six marks in the high bar.

But team competitions are regularly decided on the lowest counting score, which counted in the Pegasus team's favour as they put together solid, consistent routines, particularly on the floor.

James Hall and Courtney Tulloch

anchored the team with personal best displays as Pegasus overhauled the Austrians to win gold. Tulloch took the individual gold, while Hall won bronze.

There was also celebration for the girls, who posted excellent scores in the floor and beam disciplines despite lower difficulty values than most of their rivals.

Simple but well executed bar routines and vaults helped them finish in second place, a huge achievement in a highly talented field of gymnasts several years their senior.

The results brought praise from several of the delegations and laid the foundations for other European trips in the future. The Romanian team expressed an interest in a joint training camp, Macedonia invited Pegasus to a competition and both Croatia and Slovakia offered superb training opportunities.

MOTORSPORT



BAD LUCK: David Mayes missed out on a chance to shine at home circuit Brands Hatch

Car problems put the brakes on Mayes' Brands Hatch event

MECHANICAL problems brought sports car racer David Mayes' weekend to a premature end in the second round of the MotorSport Vision GT Cup at Brands Hatch.

The 20-year-old from Staplehurst, near Maidstone, was hoping to impress in front of a worldwide audience, with his event a support race for the final round of the A1GP Championship.

After securing a win on his debut in the series at Silverstone earlier this month, the reigning Caterham Superlight champion was full of confidence going into the event.

However, late into Friday the clutch failed on the car and the crew were unable to fix the car in time for Saturday's qualifying session.

Without recording a qualifying time, Mayes and his team were forced to abandon their hopes of securing a haul of championship points and lost ground on their title challenge.

Mayes will be back in action in the GT Cup at Snetterton on June 14.

Despite his Brands Hatch disappointment, Mayes could be set to further his racing career by making his debut in the British GT Championship later this month.

The rising sports car star is in talks with manufacturer KTM, who are to enter the series for the first time. If a deal is agreed, the young racer could find himself battling against some of the country's best GT drivers, including former British Touring Car star Michael Bentwood.

Father and manager Graham Mayes said: "It is looking positive, but nothing has been signed yet. We should find out if we have secured the deal next week. If we are successful we are hoping to be on the grid at the Rockingham round on May 31."

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Highlights from the A1GP title decider at Kent's Brands Hatch

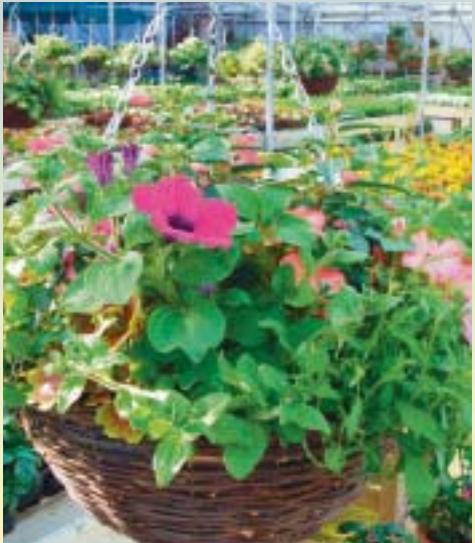
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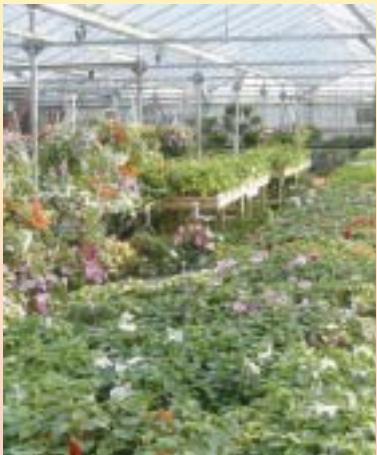
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